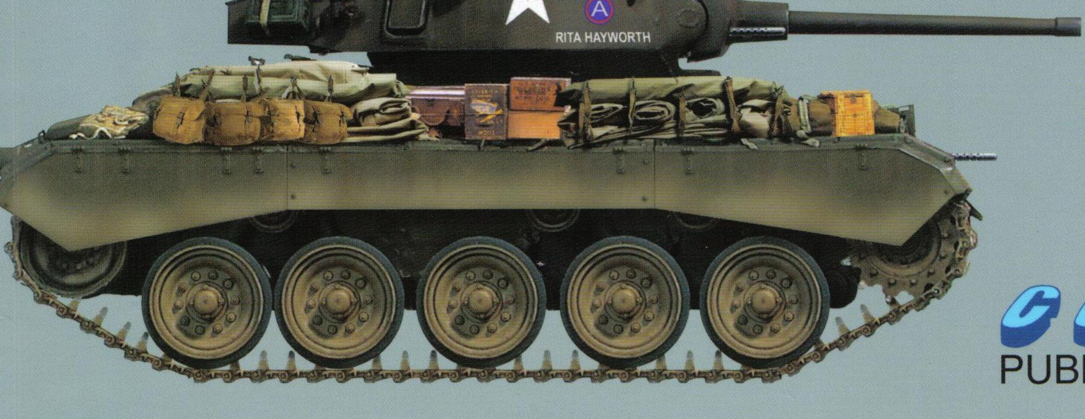
ARMOR AT WAR SERIES

7046

US Tank Battles in Germany 1944-45

Steven J. Zaloga


A
RITA HAYWORTH

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in Germany 1944-45

Text and color plates by Steven J. Zaloga

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This photo book provides a pictorial account of the tank battles fought by the US Army in Germany in 1944 and 1945. Additional photos of US armor in combat will be found in the other books in this Concord series on the M4 medium tank, US light tanks, US tank destroyers, US halftracks, and US self-propelled artillery. In addition, photographic coverage of the British campaign in Germany will be found in the two volumes in this series by David Fletcher.

Introduction

The US campaign in Germany began sooner than anticipated in mid-September 1944. With the decimation of the German army in the west in a sequence of summer encirclement battles at Falaise, the Seine river, and finally the Mons pocket in Belgium, the Wehrmacht was in headlong retreat. In the 1930s, Germany had erected a series of fortified defenses along the Westwall, better known as the Siegfried line. However, not expecting to need them so soon, many of the pillboxes and other fortifications were unmanned or had no armament. As a result, when the US 3rd Armored Division suddenly appeared on the German frontier near Aachen in mid-September, the Siegfried line proved to be a hollow defense. The US 5th Armored Division also made a penetration further south, on the approaches of Bitburg through the forested Eifel region.

Although the US Army made a narrow penetration of the Siegfried line near Aachen, Allied attention was focused elsewhere. Priority in September was given to Operation Market Garden, the British plan to seize the Rhine river bridge at Arnhem by airborne assault. The failure at Arnhem was critical for Allied plans since it distracted the British 21st Army Group from clearing the Scheldt estuary leading into the harbor at Antwerp. Without a functioning port at Antwerp, Allied forces in the Low Countries were critically short of supplies. German forces had wrecked the port facilities at Cherbourg and in the Breton ports, and the ports at Normandy were not sufficient to supply the Allied armies for offensive operations. Until the approaches to Antwerp were cleared in late November, the pace of Allied operations along the German frontier were restricted by inadequate supplies.

By October 1944, the US Army in the ETO had four armies in the field. The Bradley's 12th Army Group had two armies operating along the German frontier, Hodge's First and Simpson's Ninth Army, while Patton's Third Army was still stalled in the Metz fortifications in France while attempting to reach the German frontier along the Moselle river in Lorraine. Dever's 6th Army Group to the south had two armies in the field, the US Seventh Army and the French First Army, both fighting in Alsace to the south of Patton's formations. As a result, the bulk of the fighting in Germany in the autumn of 1944 fell to the First and Ninth Armies.

The relative lull in fighting gave the German Army Group B time to rebuild some of its forces. In spite of the chaos in September, by October the Wehrmacht defenses had begun to coalesce. Indeed, von Rundstedt's success in reforming the shattered Wehrmacht was often called the "miracle of the West".

Due to the narrow penetration towards Aachen, Bradley ordered the XIX Corps to attempt to broaden the penetration of the German defensive belt by a major assault around Ubach on 2-7 October. After the initial infantry attack stalled, the 2nd Armored Division was injected into the battle, fighting a bitter week-long battle which brought its forces through the Siegfried line to the north of Aachen. This set the stage for the first major battle in Germany for the city of Aachen. The US aim was to surround the city by a pincer movement starting on 7 October. Hitler ordered a major counterattack by I.SS-Panzer-Korps, including both the 116.Panzer-Division and the 3.Pz.Gren.Div. which began their attack on 11 October. Several days of brutal urban fighting ensued. Although the fighting was primarily carried out by the infantry on both sides, tank support was an essential ingredient in the city fighting and the Wehrmacht lost 45 tanks in the failed defense of the city. Aachen finally fell on 21 October 1944.

With Aachen in US hands, plans for further operations began to take shape. The primary US objective was to reach the Roer river as a first step to crossing the Rhine river. The tactical problem in this area was the dilemma of the Roer dams. If the Roer dams were left under German control, any US advance over the Roer river would be pointless since the Germans could open up the dams, and cut off any advance US forces by flooding the plains behind them. As a result, the capture of the Roer dams became the focus of US attention in October-November 1944. This proved to be far more difficult than anticipated, as the dams were located beyond the heavily wooded Huertgen forest. The attacks towards the dams began in earnest on 6 October with a 9th Infantry Division attack on Schmidt. German infantry resisted with tenacity, and the fighting soon became dominated by deadly artillery barrages from both sides. Airbursting in the trees above, the artillery wreaked a horrible toll on the infantry below. The US Army attempted to deploy armor into the Huertgen forest in early November when the 28th Division began a second attack on Schmidt, but the terrain did not favor the use of tanks.

In an attempt to circumvent the bloody quagmire in the Huertgen forest, in early November 1944, the First and Ninth Armies staged Operation Queen, a combined infantry-tank assault through the industrial region on the edge of the Roer river. The attack began on 16 November 1944 with a heavy air bombardment, the heaviest since Operation Cobra in July 1944. Although the bombing suppressed Germany artillery, it did little to soften the German defenses. The 3rd Armored Division pushed down the Stolberg corridor, but was unable to crack the German defenses. In a parallel offensive, the Ninth Army attacked through the Aachen corridor with the 2nd Armored Division attacking east from its bridgehead at Ubach. As the 2nd Armored Division ground its way through the urban sprawl to the northeast of Aachen, on 17 November 1944 the Wehrmacht committed its only armored reserve in the sector, the refitted 9.Panzer-Division supported by Kingtigers of the s.Pz.Abt.506. This forced the 2nd Armored Division on to the defensive for two days, but the attacks later resumed and the initial objectives were seized. However, the operation failed to bring about a decisive breakthrough in this sector.

By the beginning of December 1944, the US Army had finally fought its way through the Huertgen forest and the fortified towns east of Aachen, finally placing it on the Roer plains. The campaign had been fought primarily by the infantry divisions, which had borne a horrible cost, especially in the forest fighting. It took the two US armies 75 days of fighting to push 30 kilometers to reach the Roer at a cost of 57,000 casualties. In mid-December, another attack was planned to seize the Roer dams from the Monshau forest area. This attack had barely begun when Hitler launched the Ardennes offensive on 16 December 1944. The Battle of the Bulge diverted US attention away from any major operations in Germany until the end of January 1945. Although the Ardennes offensive managed to derail any US army offensives for a month and a half, by the time that the campaign was over in late January 1945, the German army in the west had been gutted. Many of the panzer units that had been committed to the fighting were withdrawn to the east in a futile attempt to stem the Soviet January Vistula-Oder offensive. While the Wehrmacht would continue to resist stubbornly for the next two and a half months, it would never again pose a serious threat to US offensive operations.

In the wake of the Battle of the Bulge, the equipment of the US armored divisions began to improve. After months of complaints about the poor performance of the 75mm M4 medium tank against the German Panther, supplies of the M4A3 (76mm) finally began to increase. But it wasn't until May 1945 that the 76mm versions of the M4 outnumbered the older 75mm versions. In addition, the improved types with HVSS suspension began to appear in growing numbers. This did not solve the mediocre armor protection of the M4, and so the armies began to take the matter into their own hands. Ninth Army preferred to reinforce the vulnerable glacis plate by welding on a layer of spare track links followed by a layer of sandbags and a section of artillery camouflage net to keep the appliqué in place. Patton's Third Army preferred to use armor off knocked-out American and German tanks. In February, the three armored divisions in the Third Army (4th, 6th, and 11th Armored Divisions) each received 36 of these uparmored tanks, mainly M4A3 (76mm) and M4A3E8 (76mm), and additional batches were converted in March. The Seventh Army ordnance units helped the 14th Armored Division to devise a framework that allowed sand-bags to be fitted not only to the glacis plate, but to the sides of the turret and hull as well. The neighboring 12th Armored Division also took part in this program, but also experimented with concrete armor appliqués. Besides these upgrades, some new tank types began to appear. The new M24 light tank began replacing the M5A1 light tank, and small numbers of T26E3 heavy tanks appeared in March, in time to participate in the fighting at Remagen and Cologne.

February 1945 saw a renewal of US offensives into Germany. In a series of slow, grinding attacks, the armies all pushed their way through the Siegfried line along a broad front. Patton's Third Army fought through the heavily forested Eifel and finally cleared the Vianden bulge and reached Bitburg by the end of the month. The long struggle to seize the Roer dams finally reached fruition. Although two dams were captured, the Germans opened the floodgates on a third, delaying a planned Ninth Army offensive until the end of the month. On 22 February, Ninth Army launched Operation Grenade, an assault over the Roer on to the Cologne plain. Bradley wanted his armies to finally synchronize their actions after all the disjointed local offensives of the past month, and on 1 March, launched Operation Lumberjack which pushed the US armies across the Roer plain and to the Rhine river along a line from Cologne to Bonn to Koblenz. The US Army was now facing the last major geographic obstacle, the Rhine river. The Rhine presented a formidable challenge not only due to the breadth of the river, but due to the rugged terrain and high cliffs along many areas of the river.

By this stage of the war, German defenses had begun to crumble as the Wehrmacht could no longer put up a coherent defense along so broad a front. The German tank force had nearly evaporated due to the heavy tank losses in the Ardennes, and the lack of trained crews to man the tanks being produced inside Germany. Although German armored vehicle production had reached an all-time high in December 1944, the lack of crews and fuel meant that these vehicles went to waste. For example, on 15 March 1945, the entire German operational tank inventory in the West consisted of a paltry 239 tanks including 59 Pz.Kpfw.IV, 152 Panthers, and 28 Tigers and Kingtigers. Added to this were 126 StuGs, 77 Pz.IV/70 tank destroyers and 41 Flak panzers. The US tank strength in the ETO at the time was 6,249 M4 and M4 (76mm) tanks.

Under such circumstances, small setbacks had catastrophic results. Although Hitler had issued explicit orders that all Rhine bridges should be destroyed, the Ludendorff bridge at Remagen was kept open to the last minute to permit the retreat of trapped Wehrmacht forces. The delay proved fatal when a task force with new T26E3 heavy tanks from 9th Armored Division unexpectedly charged the bridge, and managed to seize a toehold on the east bank. The US Army did not immediately exploit the Remagen bridgehead, as Montgomery's 21st Army Group was scheduled to launch a major Rhine crossing several days later. In the interim, Patton's Third Army made one of the most spectacular tank advances of the campaign, pushing through the Saar-Palatinate triangle in a week from 12 to 21 March, and putting US forces squarely along the southern Rhine river, with Seventh Army quickly following suit.

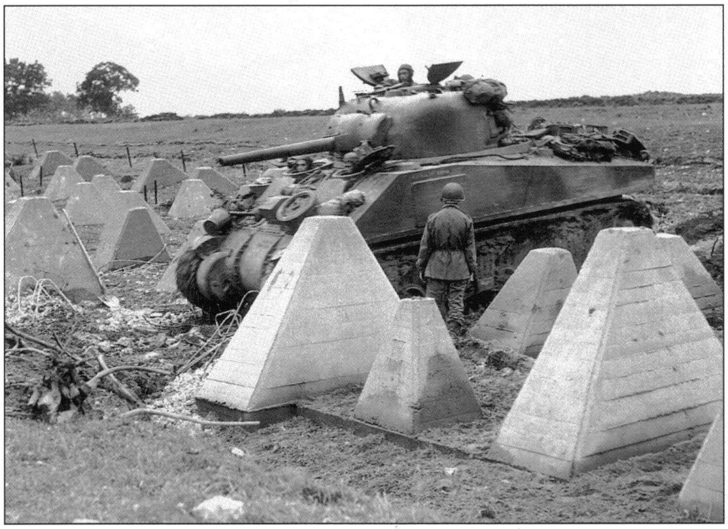
Operation Plunder, Montgomery's assault across the Rhine, began on 24 March and was accompanied by a corresponding assault in the neighboring US Ninth Army, spearheaded by the 8th Armored Division. While this offensive gathered much of the press attention, Patton's Third Army quietly slipped an infantry division over the Rhine near Frankfurt and by 26 March had a firm bridgehead into the suburbs of Frankfurt. First Army launched its own offensive over the Rhine from the Remagen bridgehead, so that by the end of the month, there were three solid ruptures of the German defenses along the Rhine river, Germany's last defensive barrier in the West.

The Rhine crossings placed the Germans defenses in the West in an extremely precarious position. In late March, Bradley decided to try to exploit these problems by launching a bold armored attack from the First Army sector near Bonn to seize the area around Paderborn, effectively trapping much of Army Group B in the Ruhr industrial zone. In parallel, the armored spearheads' of Patton's Third Army were directed along the First Army's flank aiming northeast from Frankfurt towards Kassel. The spearhead of the First Army drive, the 3rd Armored Division, reached Paderborn by 1 April but stirred up a hornet's nest of opposition. In the swansong of the panzer forces in the West, Model ordered the tank training schools located at the Sennelager near Paderborn to form a scratch formation called SS Ersatzbrigade Westfalen. The various panzer units in the area were able to scrape up 11 Panthers, 3 Jagdpanthers, 3 Tigers, 23 Kingtigers, and 6 Jagdtigers. In a series of sharp engagements, the battle group brought the US attack to a halt. To restore the initiative, the 2nd Armored Division plunged forward towards Lippstadt, outflanking the panzer thrust, and sealing the Ruhr pocket. The German panzer units trapped in the pocket were too weak to stage a mobile counter-attack. While it would take more than two weeks to reduce the pocket, in the end some 317,000 Germans surrendered, for all intents and purposes ending any organized German resistance in the West. German panzer formations outside the Ruhr pocket were mostly isolated units with only a handful of armor.

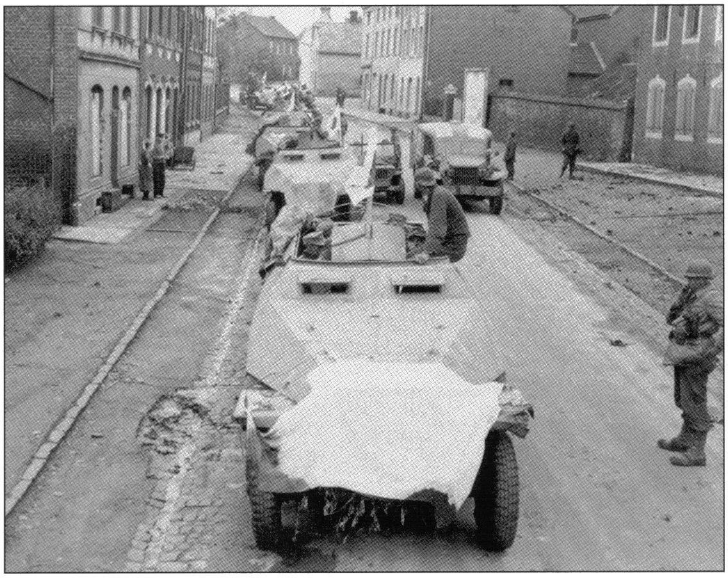
The elimination of the Ruhr pocket by mid-April 1945 set the stage for some of the fastest and deepest armored drives of the war as the US tank units began their attacks towards the Elbe river, which was reached by the First and Third Armies by 24 April 1945. These were the last major assaults in central Germany since under an agreement with the Soviets, the Allies would meet up on the Elbe river. Fighting continued in southern Germany, as Patton's Third Army and Patch's Seventh Army poured into Bavaria towards the Czech and Austrian frontiers. These forces had reached as far as Plzen in Czechoslovakia, and Linz in Austria by the time the war ended in early May 1945.

The photographs here are all official US Army Signal Corps photos from the collections of the US National Archives, the Military History Institute at the US Army War College, and the special collections at the US Military Academy, West Point.

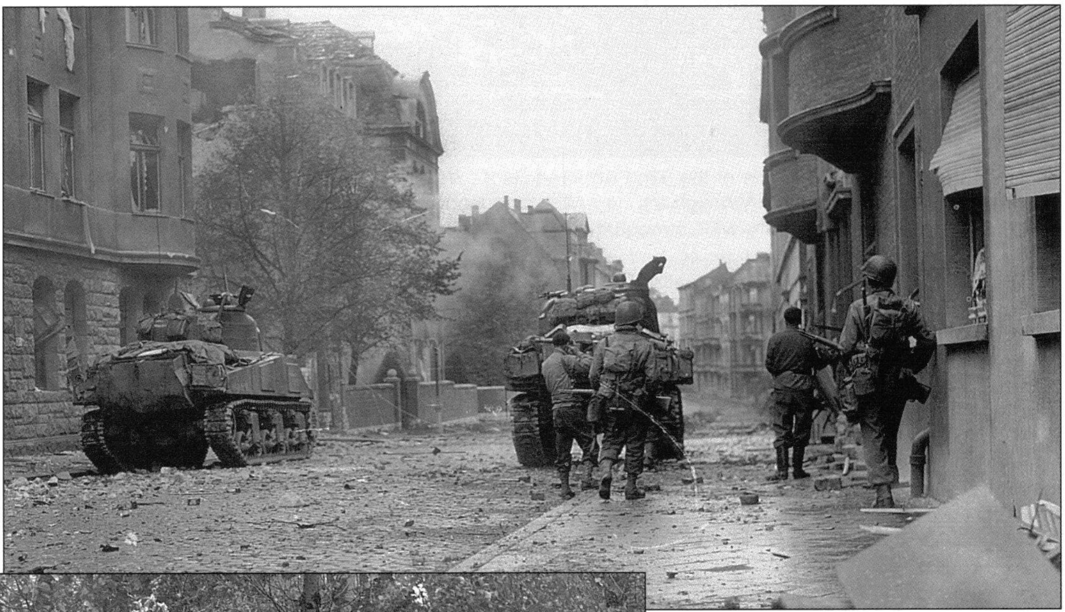
Breaching the Siegfried Line



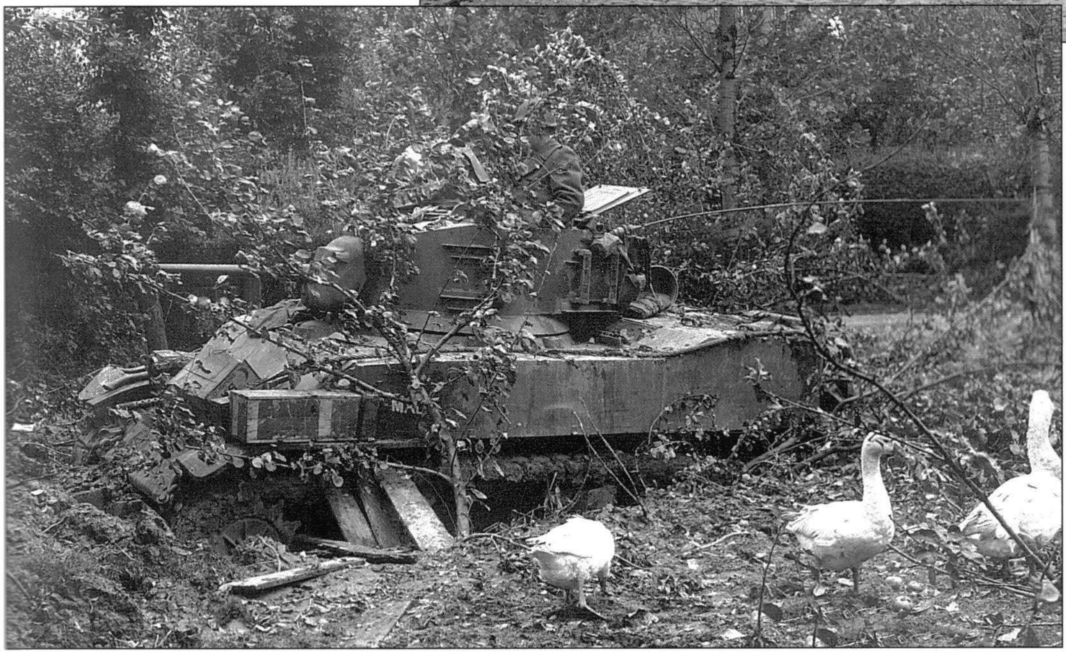
On 13 September 1944, Task Force X of the 3rd Armored Division penetrated the Siegfried line near Roeten, the first US troops into Germany. Here, one of the division's M4 tanks drives through some dragon's teeth along the border on the approaches to Aachen, in the standard olive drab and black camouflage paint that the division had worn since Operation Cobra. (NARA)



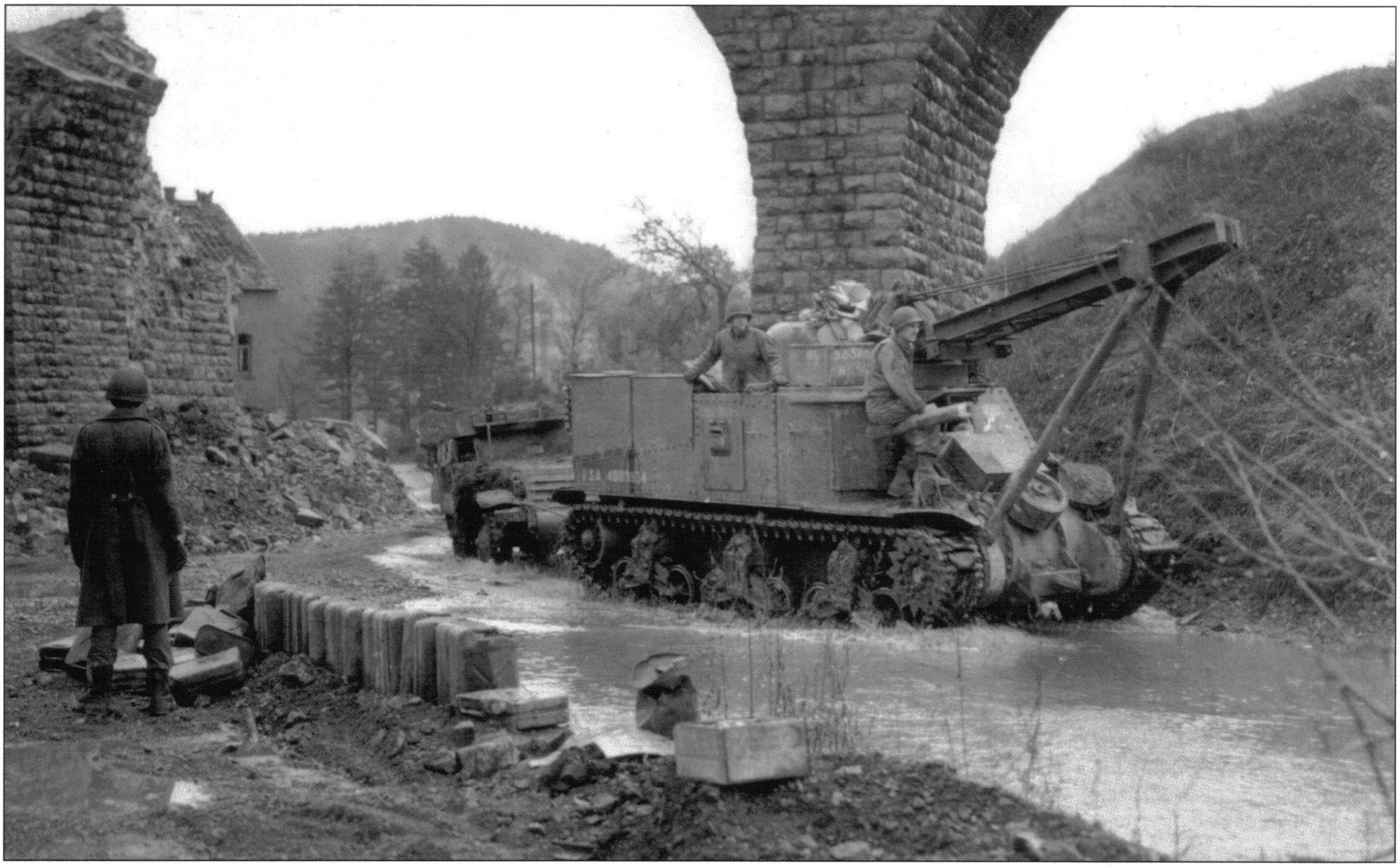
A column of Sd.Kfz.251 Ausf.D half-tracks led by an armored ambulance are used to evacuate wounded after the city fell to the 30th Division on the afternoon of 21 October 1944 after a bitter month long fight. These are probably from the 3.Panzer-Grenadier-Division. (NARA)



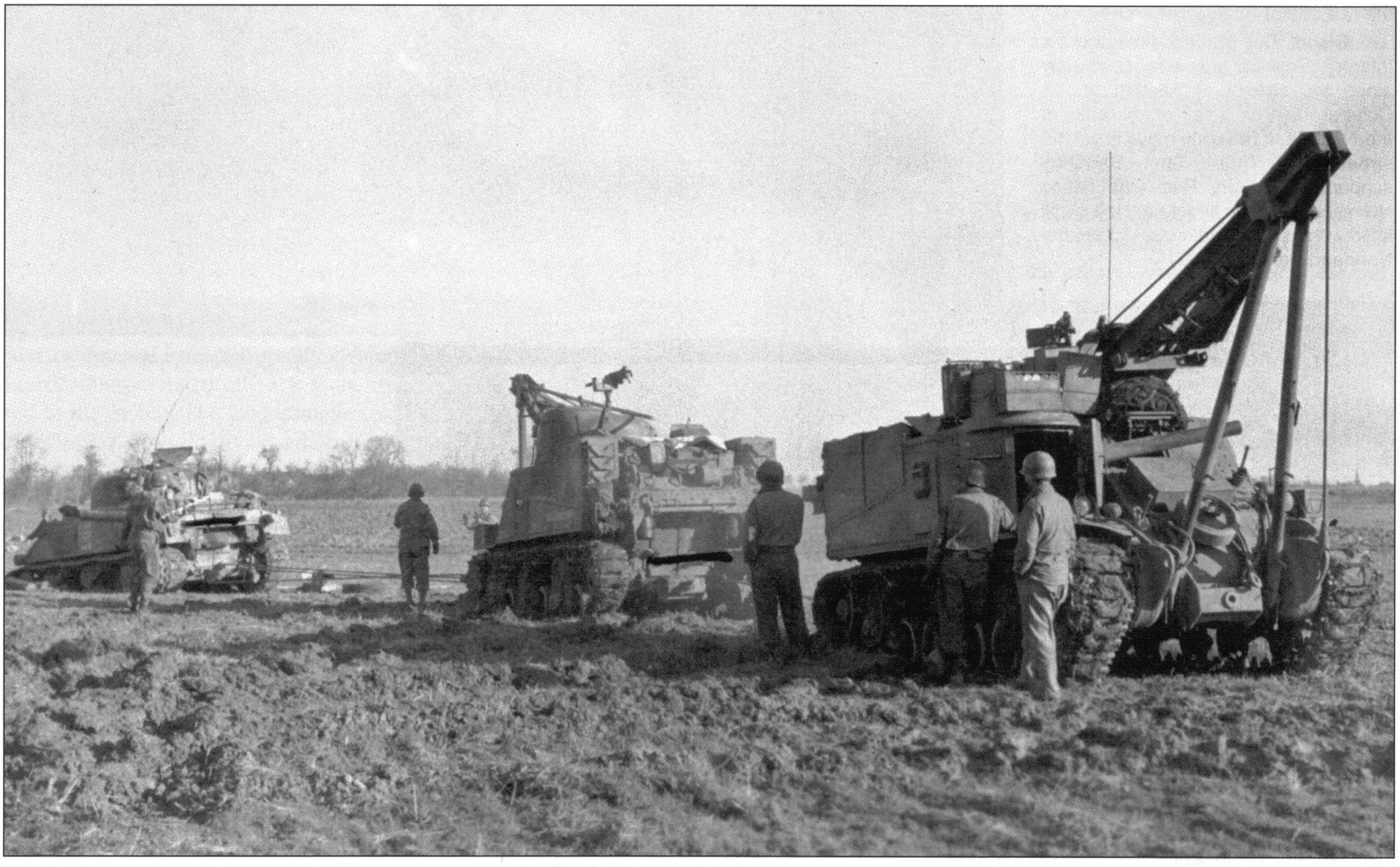
GIs of Co. M, 26th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division advance cautiously along the streets of Aachen on 15 October 1944 as a pair of M4 tanks of the 745th Tank Battalion move down the street. The 745th Tank Battalion supported the "Big Red One" since Normandy, and the tank to the left is still fitted with its rear wading trunk from the Normandy landing. (NARA)



A heavily camouflaged M5A1 light tank named "Malt" from the 2nd Armored Division occupies a depression near Baeswiller on 19 October 1944 while a clutch of geese look on. The 2nd Armored Division, alongside the 30th Division, had pushed a gap through the Siegfried line the previous week. (NARA)

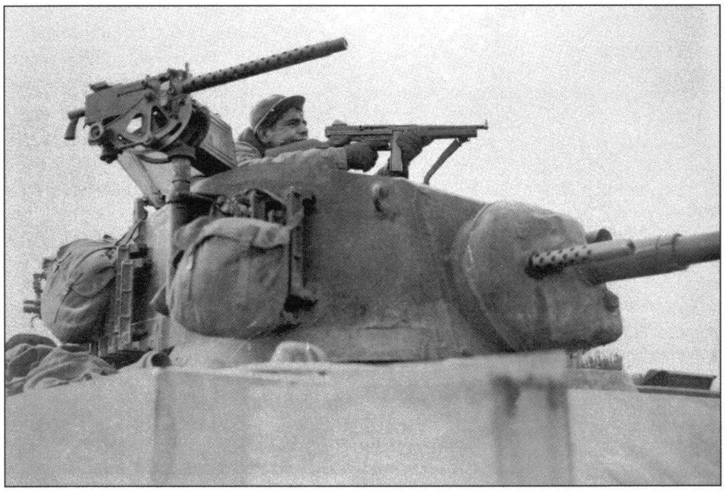


A M31 tank recovery vehicle of the 32nd Armored Regt., 3rd Armored Division towing a disabled M3 half-track passes by an aqueduct near Stolberg, Germany on 24 October 1944. Although the new M32 tank recovery vehicle was the authorized equipment in tank maintenance units, in fact a number of older battalions still employed the M31 through the end of the war. (NARA)

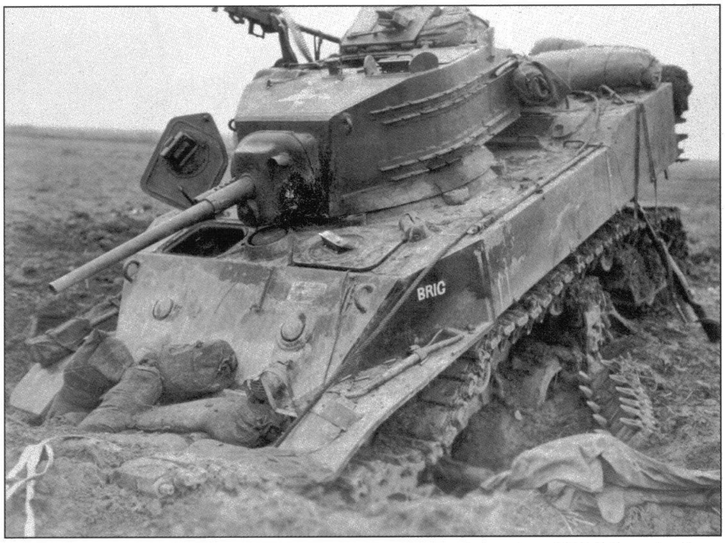


Mud was a major obstacle in tank operations along the Siegfried line in October-November 1944 due to the unusually wet weather. Here, a pair of T2 (M31) tank recovery vehicles try to extract a M4 tank of the 747th Tank Battalion that became bogged down during operations on 29 October. (USMA)

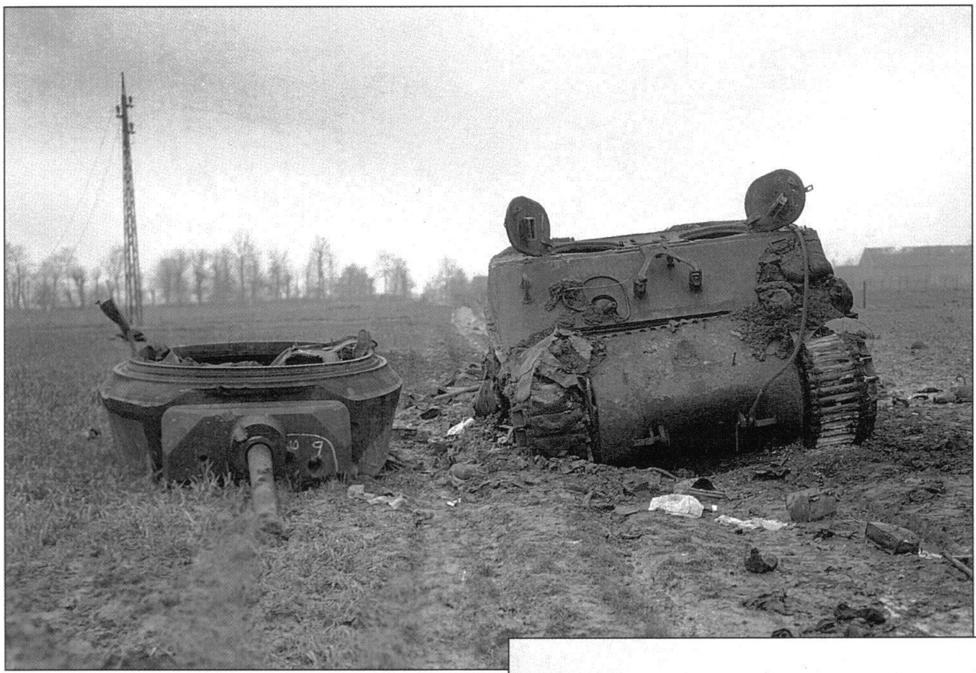
The Assault to the Roer River



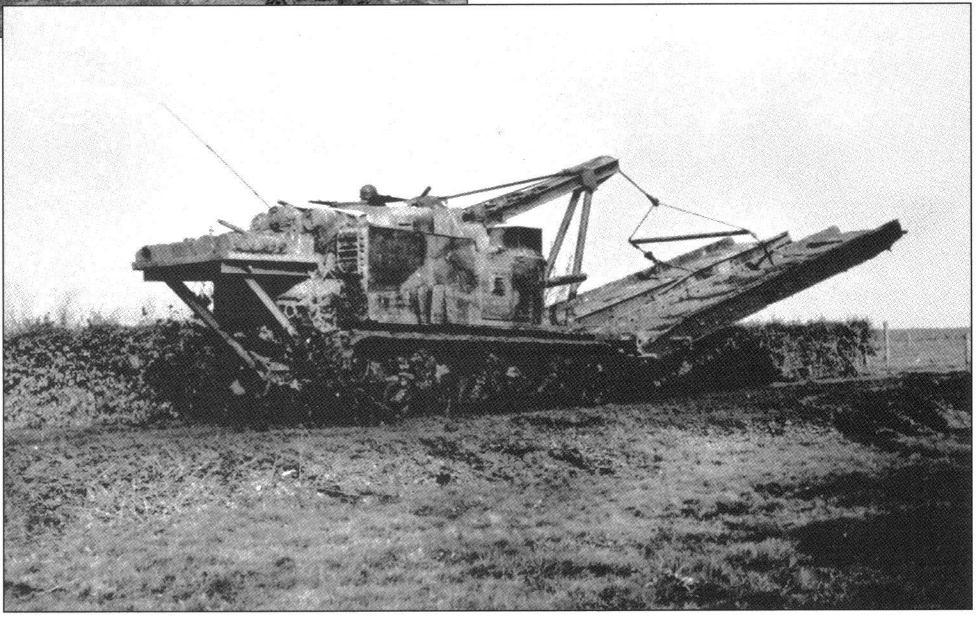
The commander of a M5A1 light tank of F Troop, 113th Cavalry Recon Squadron fires his .45 cal Thompson submachine gun at targets near Kievelberg on 5 November 1944. (USMA)



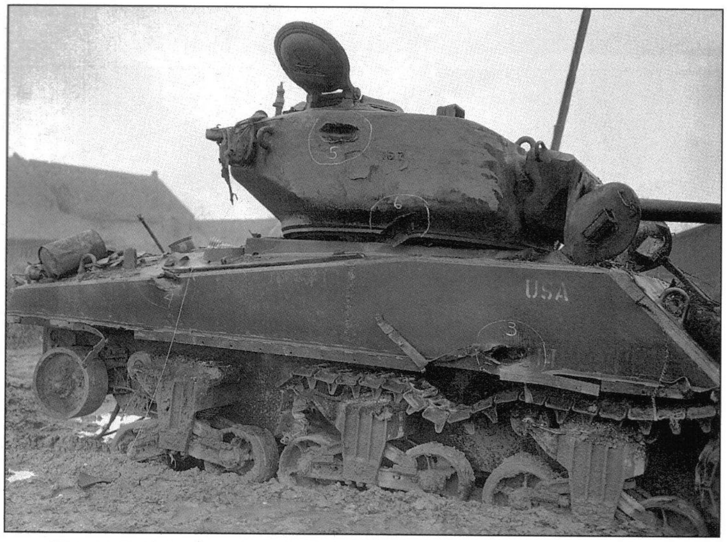
A M5A1 light tank named "Bric" from the 2nd Armored Division sits in a crater after having its front bogie blown off by a mine near Loverich, Germany in late November 1944. The fighting for the Roer area took place in very muddy conditions which made it difficult to employ armor. (MHI)



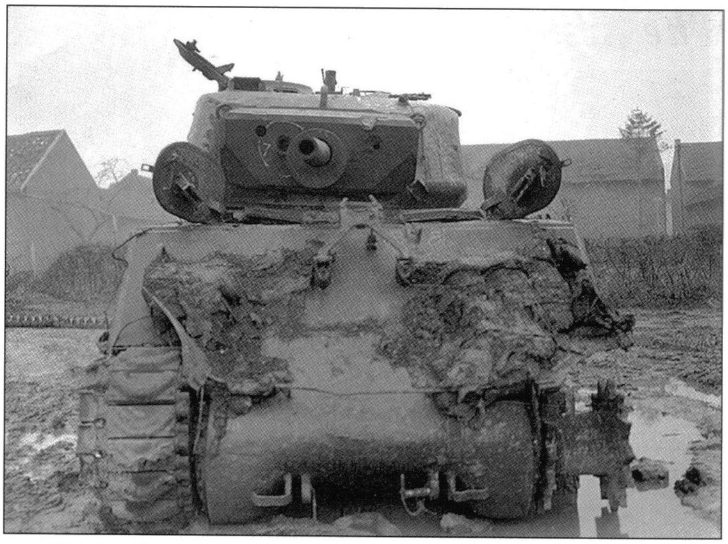
One of the first units into combat with the M4A3E2 was the 743rd Tank Battalion which was allotted 15 of these in November 1944 while supporting the 30th Infantry Division. This tank was knocked out near Fronhoven in late November 1944 after having been hit by four 88mm rounds from an anti-tank gun about 800 yards away near Lohn. One bounced off the glacis plate, and two off the mantlet before a lucky hit was made which actually entered the telescope opening. Although not immediately apparent, this vehicle was fitted with a flamethrower in the hull machine gun position. This provides a unique view of the contours of the lower turret. (NARA)



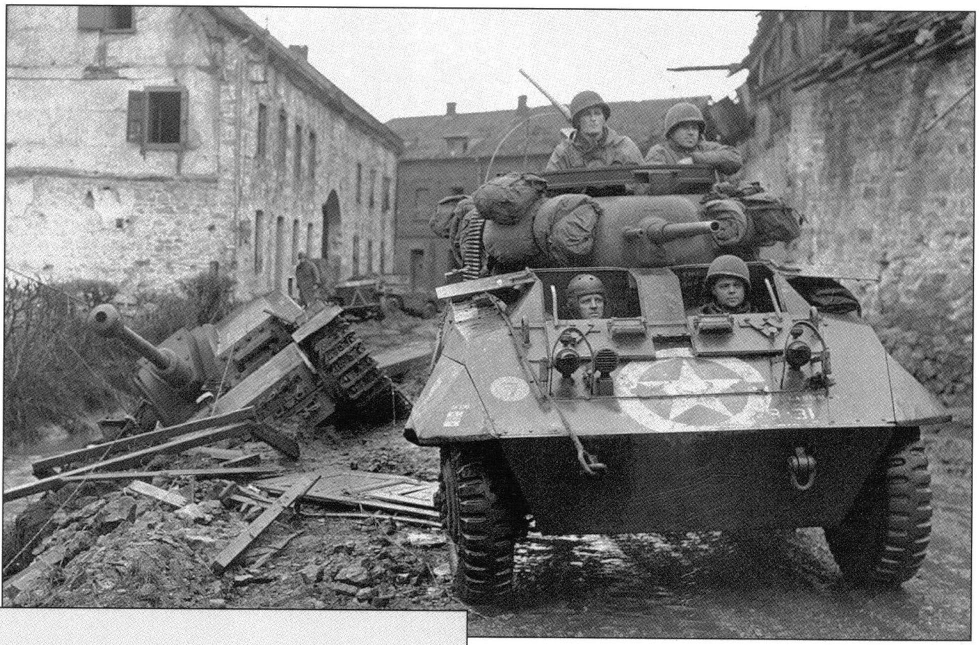
Anti-tank ditches and other obstructions were a constant hindrance during operations along the Siegfried line, leading to many improvisations by the armored engineers. One particularly popular innovation was the development of fittings that permitted M31 tank recovery vehicles to carry and deploy treadway bridge sections to breach these gaps. This example is being used by the 17th Armored Engineer Battalion of the 2nd Armored Division near Beggendorf on 16 November 1944 at the start of Operation Queen, the failed offensive to reach the Roer. (USMA)



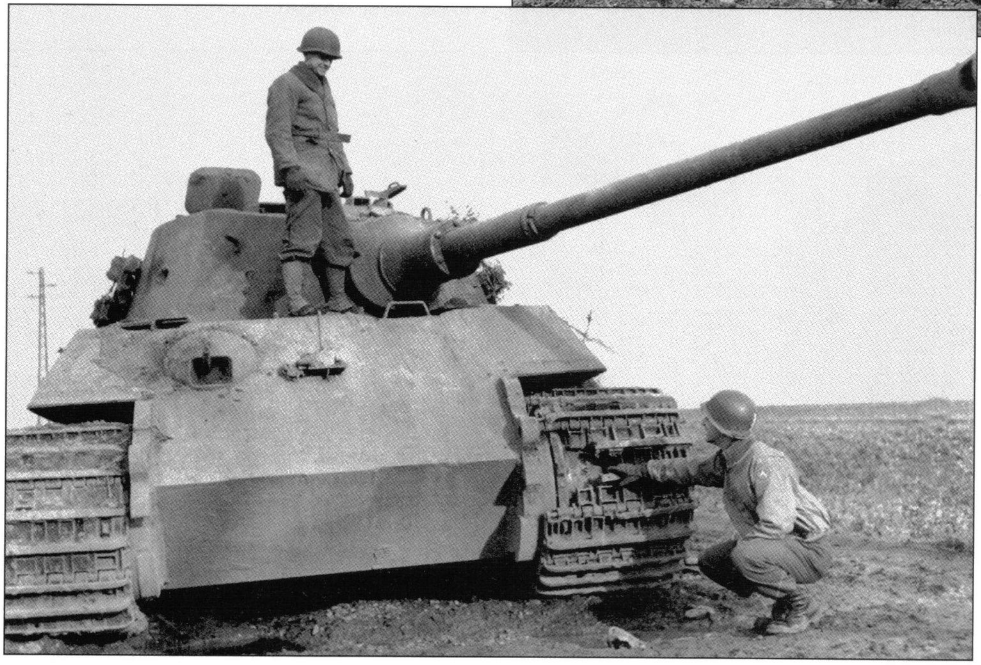
This M4A3E2 assault tank of the 743rd Tank Battalion was knocked out in late November 1944 near Fronhoven after having run over a US Army mine, immobilizing it. It was then hit by eight 88mm anti-tank projectiles at a range of about 800 yards. One round penetrated the right sponson, and set the tank on fire but the other rounds failed to penetrate. The M4A3E2 was the only US tank able to absorb this amount of punishment. (NARA)



This is a front view of the same M4A3E2 knocked out near Fronhoven. An 88mm hit on the glacis plate obliterated some sandbags on the hull front. Three other hits are evident on the front including one near the gun tube, one on the upper edge of the mantlet, and one on the upper edge of the glacis plate. (NARA)

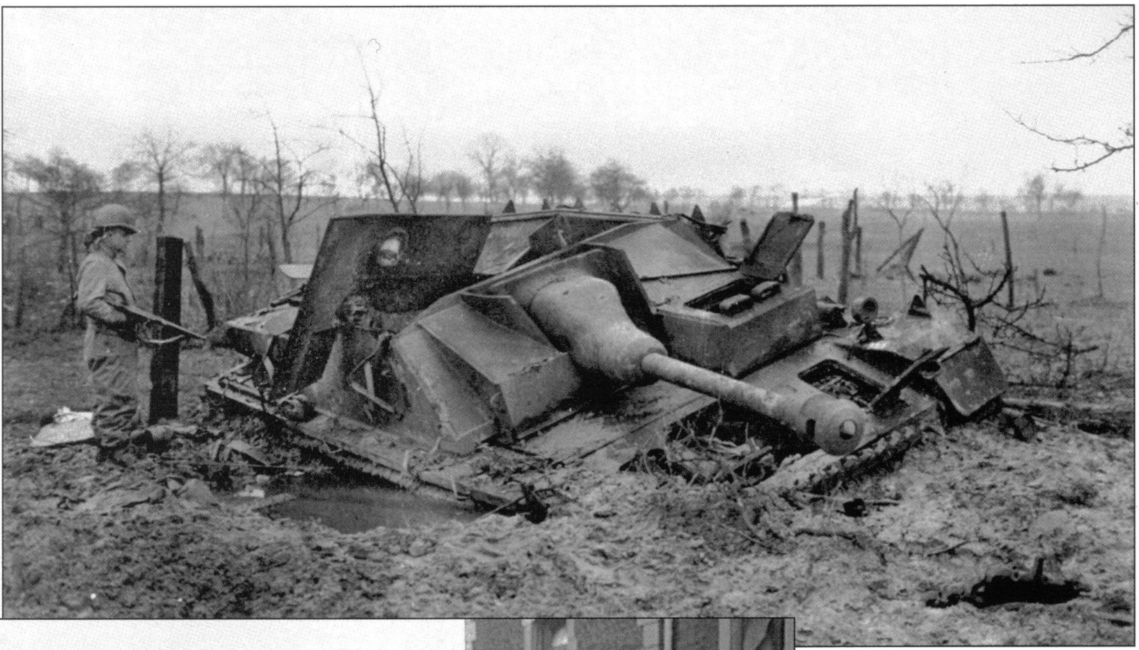


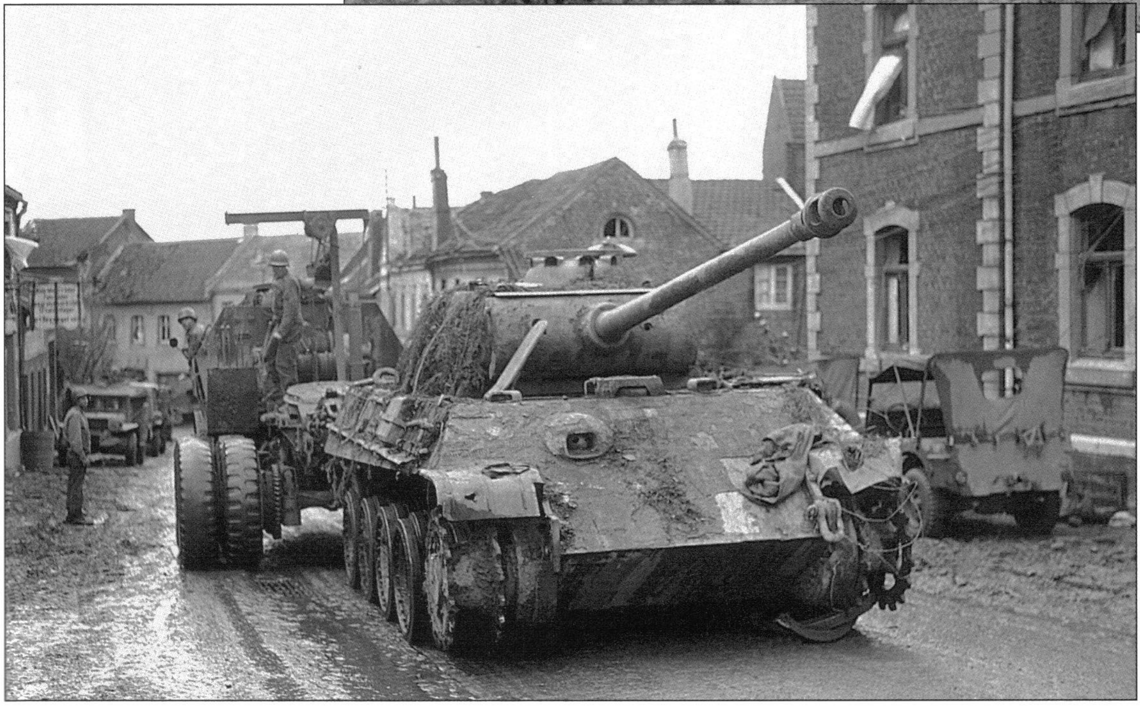
A M8 armored car of the 17th Cavalry Group, supporting the Ninth Army, passes the wreck of a German StuG.III assault gun from the 3.Panzer-Grenadier-Division in Kinzweiller, Germany on 21 November 1944. The town was taken on 19 November by the 117th Infantry Regiment, heavily supported by armor. (NARA)



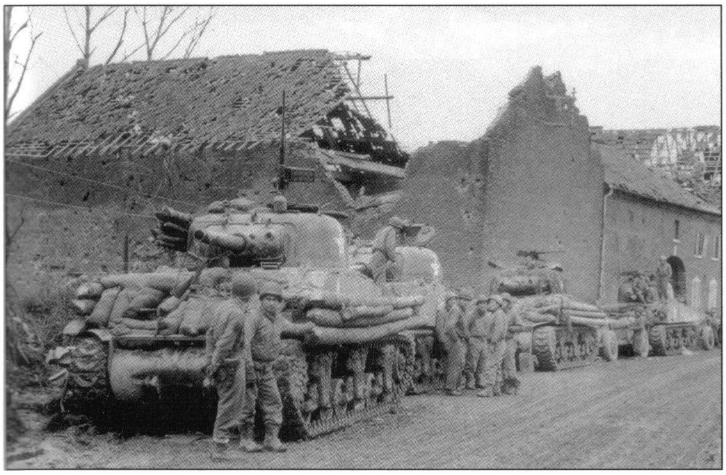
During fighting near Freialdenhoven on 28 November 1944, this Kingtiger heavy tank from s.Pz.Abt.506 was hit repeatedly by tank destroyers from the 702nd Tank Destroyer Battalion, 2nd Armored Division. The Kingtiger was first stopped by a hit on the left track, and then a M36 90mm GMC hit the turret side from a range of a thousand yards, destroying the tank. This Kingtiger unit supported the 9.Panzer-Division in a mid-November counter-attack to stop the 2nd Armored Division. (NARA)

This StuG.IV was abandoned in a shell hole after having suffered a catastrophic internal ammunition fire which blew off its roof. (Patton Museum)

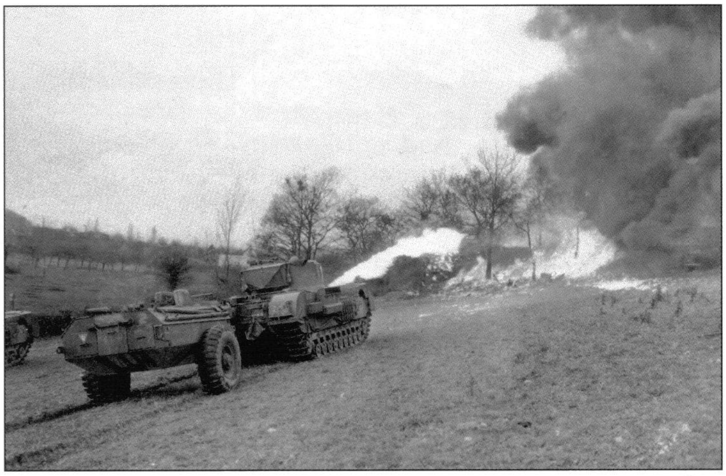




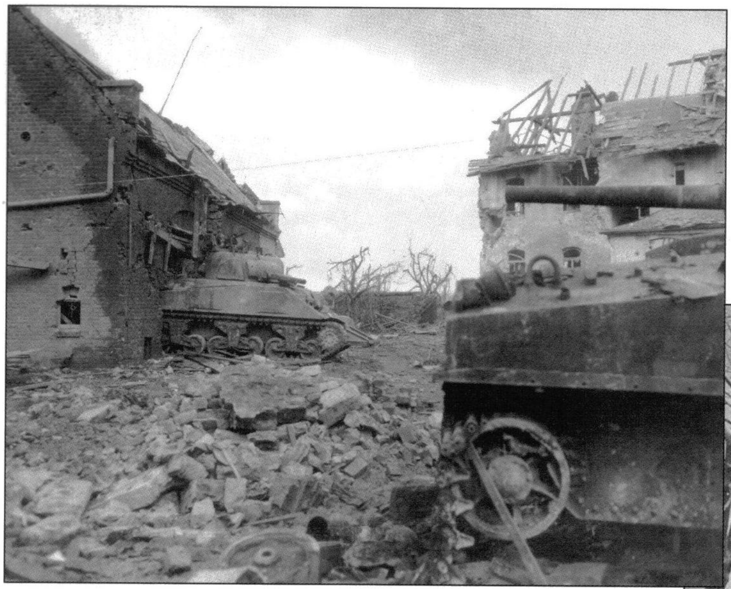
During the last two weeks of November, the 2nd Armored Division took part in the offensive to push past Aachen to the Roer river. The area was tenaciously defended including panzer units such as the 9.Panzer-Division. This is a Panther Ausf.G captured during the fighting, and being hauled away from the battlefield by a M25 prime mover, the tractor portion of the famous Dragon Wagon tank retriever. (USMA)



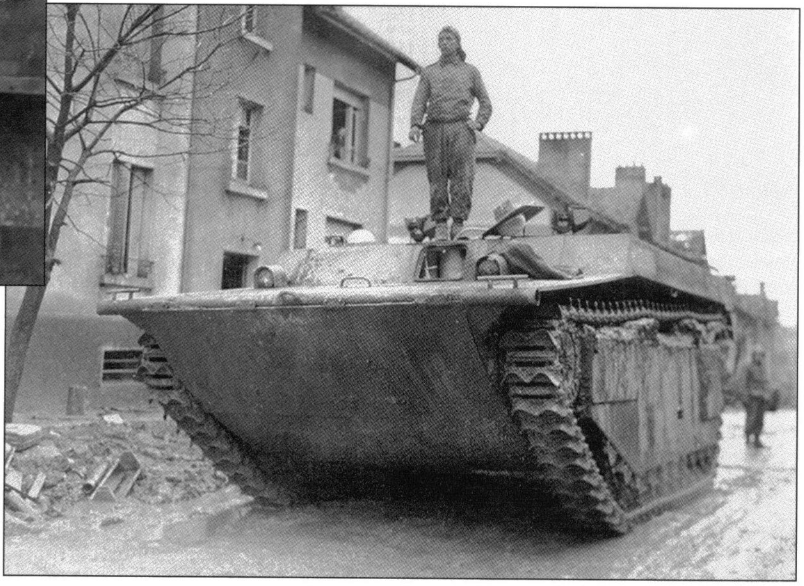
The headquarters company of the 771st Tank Battalion takes a breather in Welz on 29 November while supporting the 102nd Division's attempts to gain a foothold on the Roer river. The tanks are M4 assault guns, armed with a 105mm howitzer, and used for indirect fire support of the battalion. They are stowed with corduroy matting made from logs to help when the tanks encountered deep mud. (NARA)



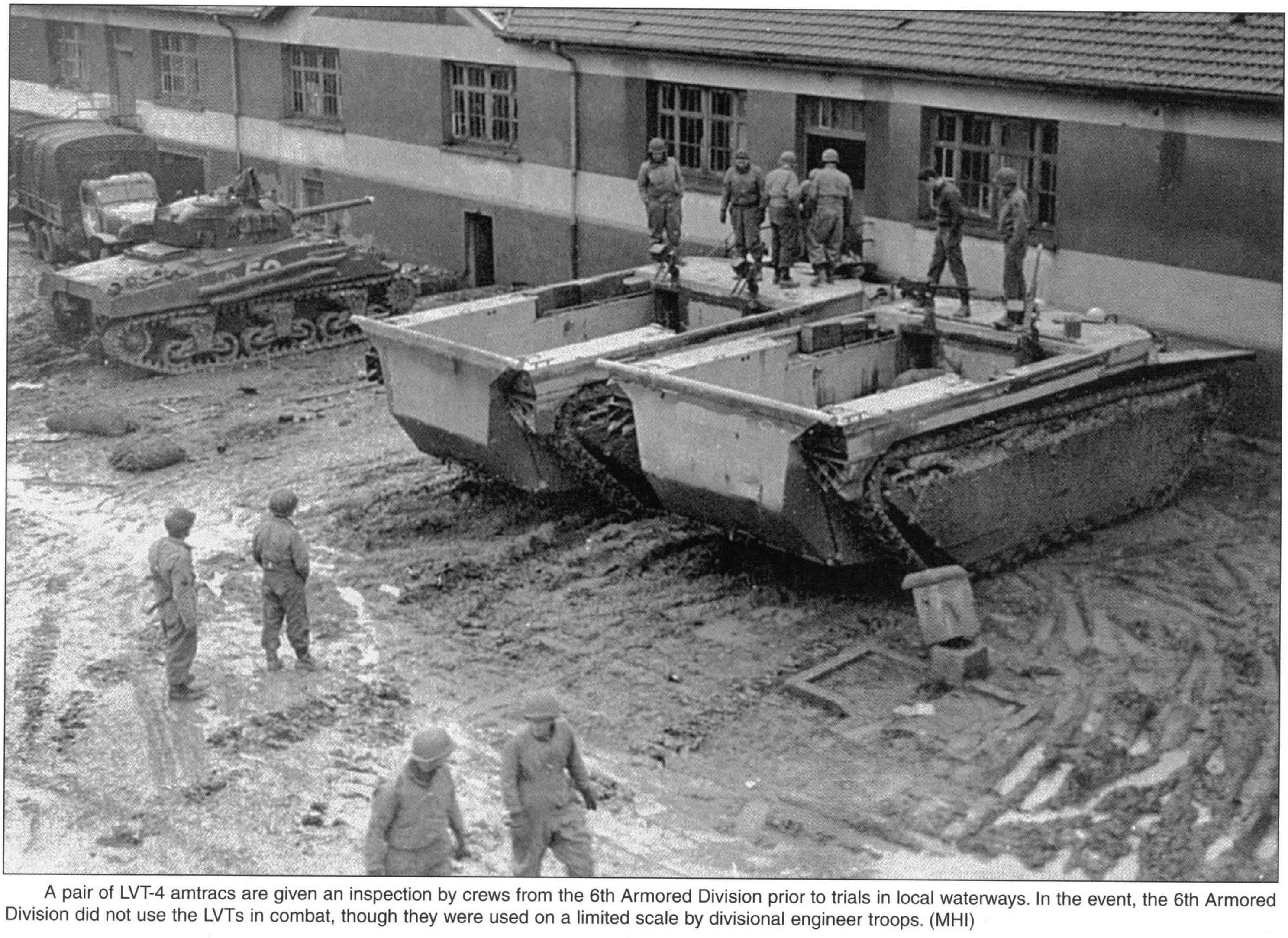
Due to shortages of flame-thrower tanks, British tanks were often seconded to US units for support. In this case, a Churchill Crocodile of the 9020 Tank Squadron, 1st Fife and Forfar Yeomanry was attached to the US 2nd Armored Division during operations in late November along the German Siegfried line. Here a Crocodile is attacking a target near Merkstein, Germany on 3 December 1944. (NARA)



A M4 of the 709th Tank Battalion uses the shelter of a shattered house in the devastated town of Huertgen on 5 December after the town was taken by the 121st Infantry. The M4 is still fitted with a Rhino hedgerow cutter. In the foreground is a burned out M4 tank lost in the earlier fighting on 28 November. (NARA)

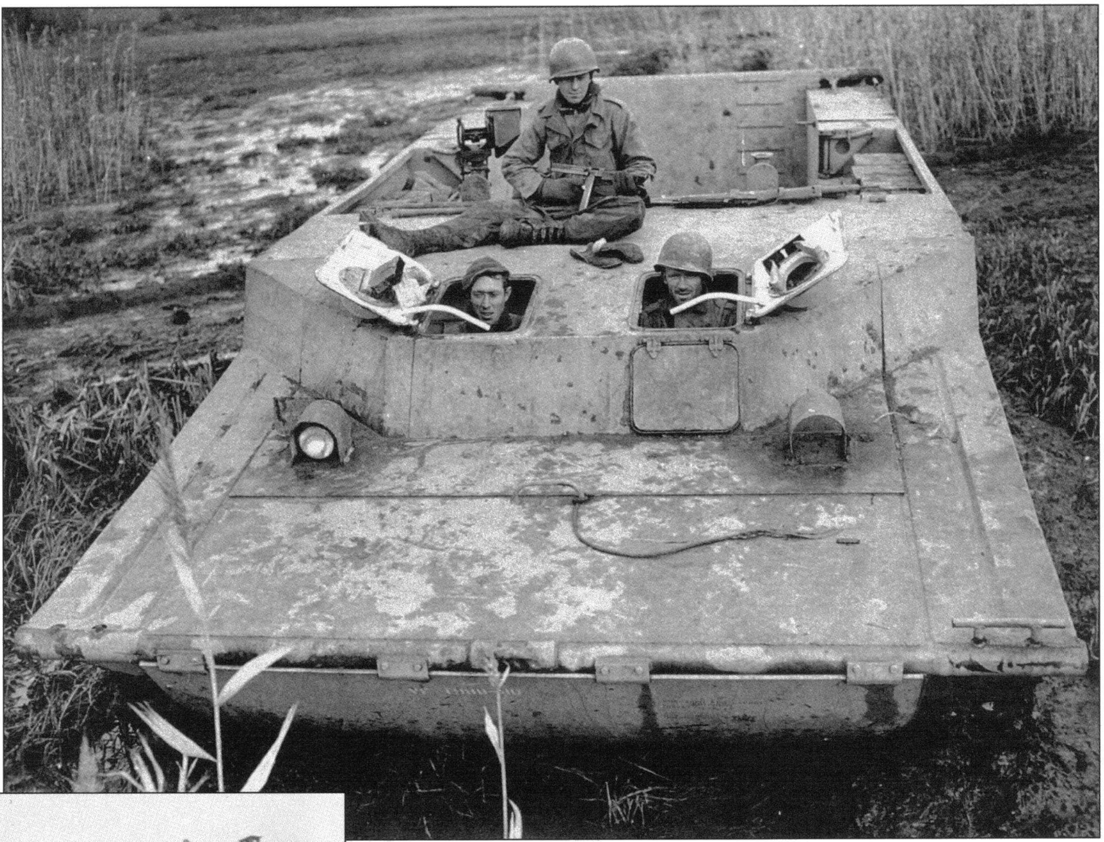


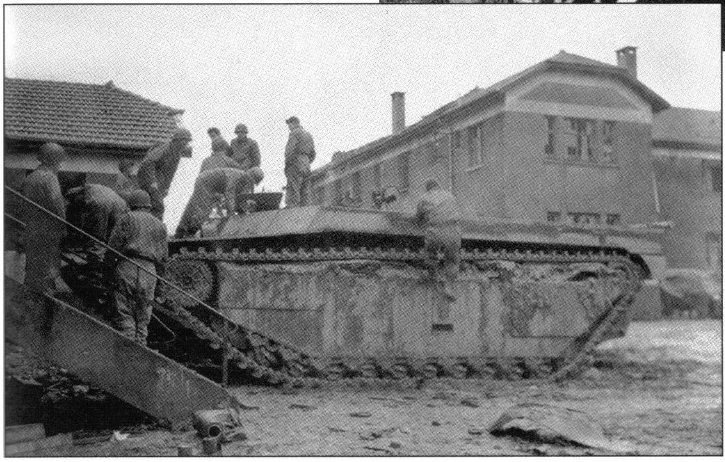
In early December, a number of amtracs were delivered to the divisional trains of the 6th Armored Division to familiarize crews in anticipation of river crossing operations over the Roer and Rhine. This is an LVT-4 from the original batch delivered to Valette, France on 2 December 1944. (MHI)



A pair of LVT-4 amtracs are given an inspection by crews from the 6th Armored Division prior to trials in local waterways. In the event, the 6th Armored Division did not use the LVTs in combat, though they were used on a limited scale by divisional engineer troops. (MHI)

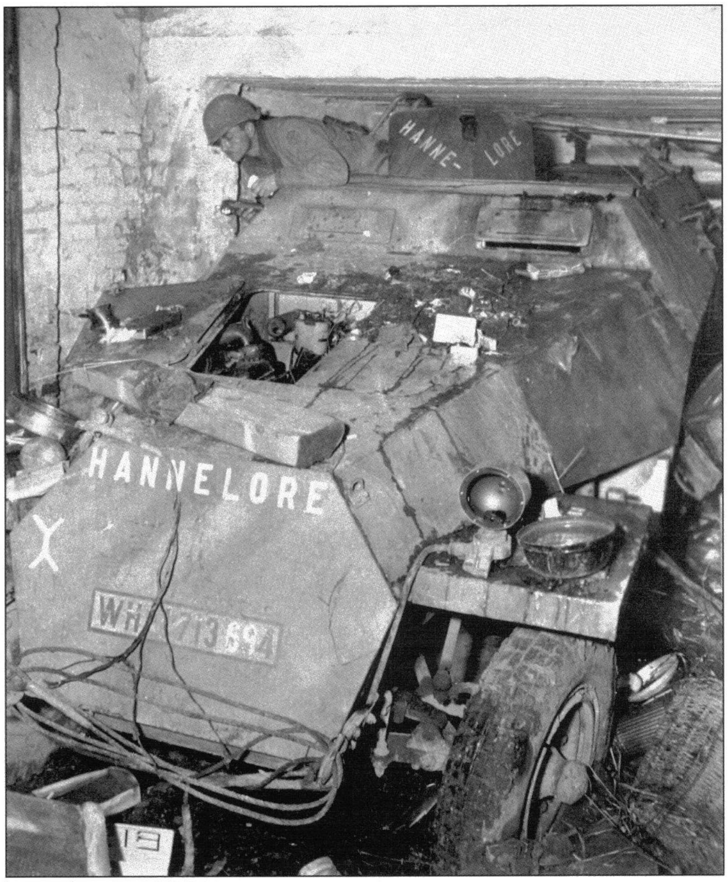
A LVT-4 in the hands of the 6th Armored Division during trials in marshy lands near Valette in early December 1944. In early March 1945, the 747th Tank Battalion turned in its tanks and swapped them for 17 LVT-2 and 8 LVT-4s which were used on 24-26 March for the Rhine crossing operations. (MHI)



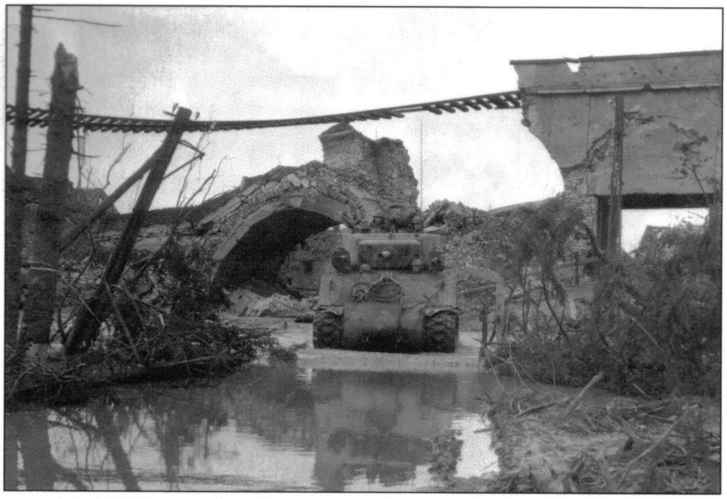


A LVT-4 returns from a test-spin in a local lake on 7 December 1944 with mud caked up on the tracks. As can be seen, this particular amtrac has several armor panels added over the pontoons to protect the crew and drive train. (NARA)

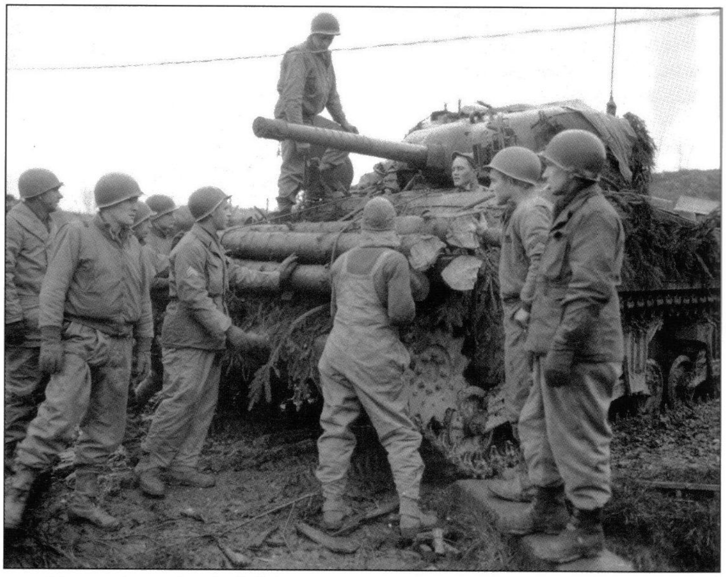
A group of M8 75mm howitzer motor carriages provide fire support for the 47th Armored Infantry Battalion, 5th Armored Division during the fighting for the Huertgen forest on 7 December 1945. By early December, the US forces had finally fought their way to the eastern edge of the woods and on to the approaches to the Roer river. (NARA)



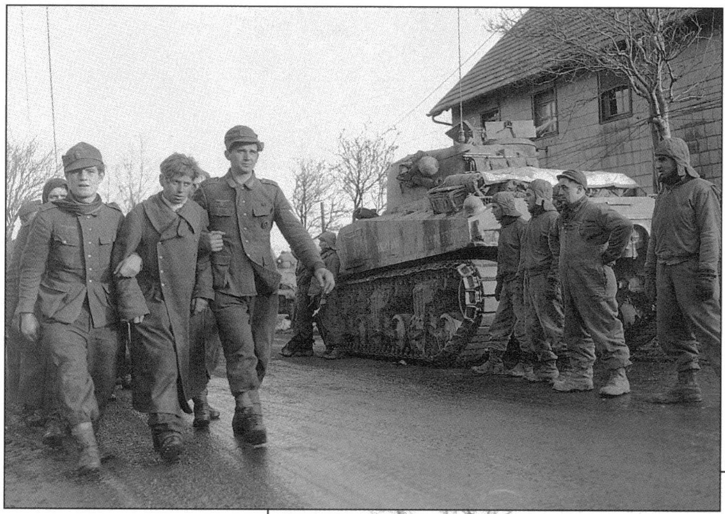
A GI inspects a Sd.Kfz.251 Ausf.D found in a garage in Ederen during clean-up operations along the Roer river on 5 December 1944. The half-track carries the name "Hannelore" and a tactical marking on the bow which is apparently that of the 9.Panzer-Division which defended the area until late November when it was pulled out to refit prior to the Ardennes offensive. (USMA)



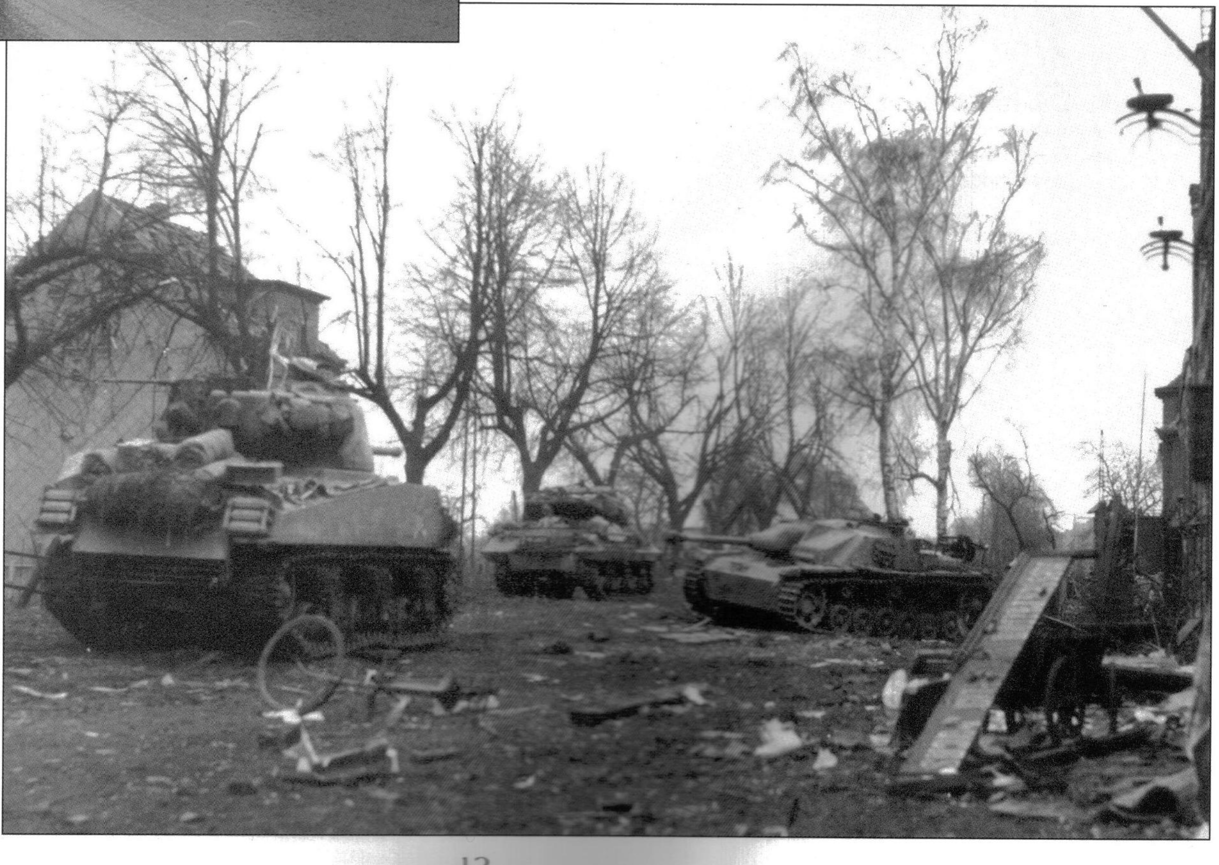
A M4A3E2 assault tank passes under a destroyed railroad viaduct on 7 December 1944 following the fighting for Langerwehe, the industrial town that was the gateway from the Huertgen forest on to the Roer plain. This is probably a tank from the 746th Tank Battalion as the 1st Infantry Division with its attached 745th Tank Battalion was pulled out of the town on 5 December after the bloody battle to reach the Roer. (NARA)



Troops from the 39th Infantry, 9th Division help the crew of a M4 tank of the 746th Tank Battalion attach a section of corduroy matting on the front of the tank on 10 December, the day that the division started a new attack along the Siegfried line along with the 3rd Armored Division. The matting consisted of several logs tied together with wire that could be laid down as a carpet in front of the tank when particularly deep mud was encountered. This was a common field expedient in the autumn of 1944. (NARA)

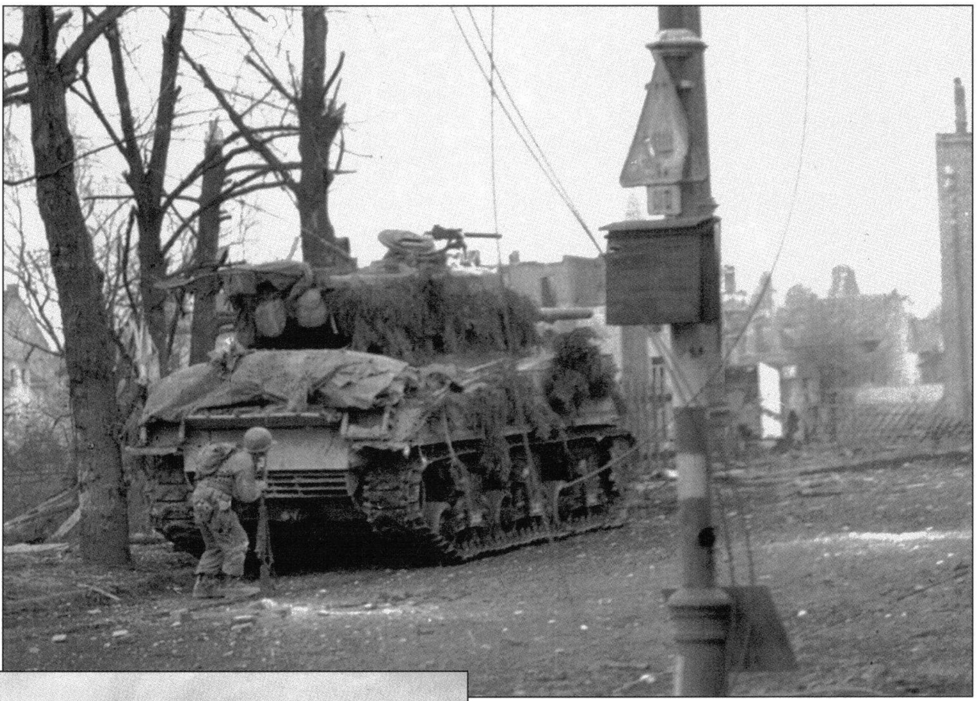


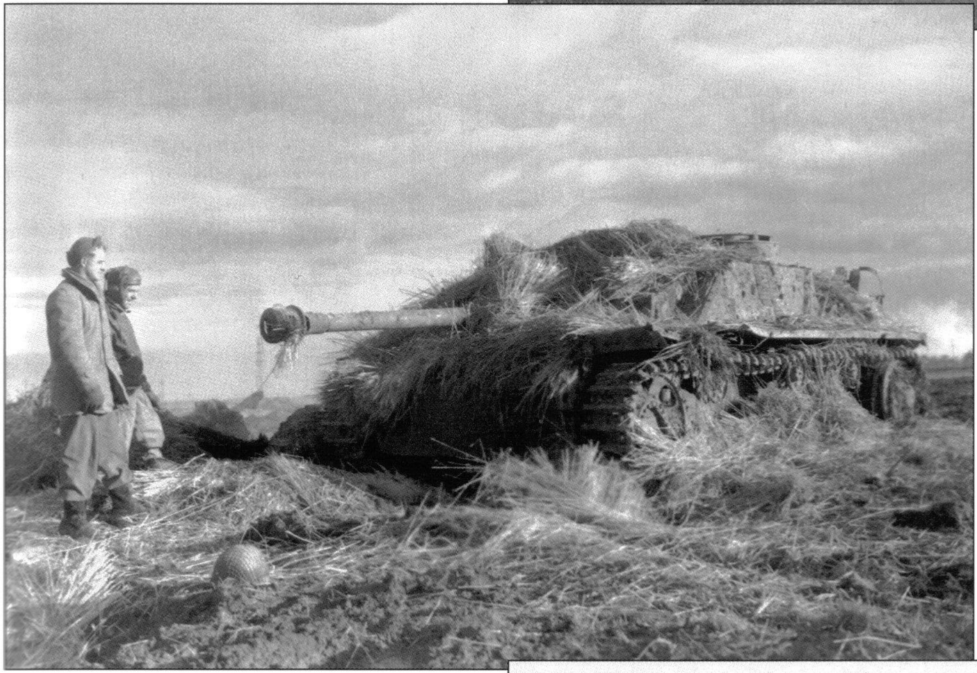
The crew of a M4 tank of the 709th Tank Battalion watch as a column of German prisoners walk by in Lammersdorf on 14 December 1944. The fighting for this stretch of the Siegfried line by the 78th Division continued over the next few days, and even after the start of the Battle of the Bulge a few miles south in the Monschau forest two days later. (NARA)



Even though the Battle of the Bulge had already started in neighboring Belgium, the fighting continued along the Siegfried line to push out of the dreaded Heurtgen forest. Here a M4A3 (76mm) from the 774th Tank Battalion and a M10 tank destroyer move past a StuG.III Ausf.G in Gurzenich in support of the 83rd Division on 17 December 1944. By this stage, the US First Army had emerged from the Huertgen forest and reached their objective on the plains approaching the Roer River. (NARA)

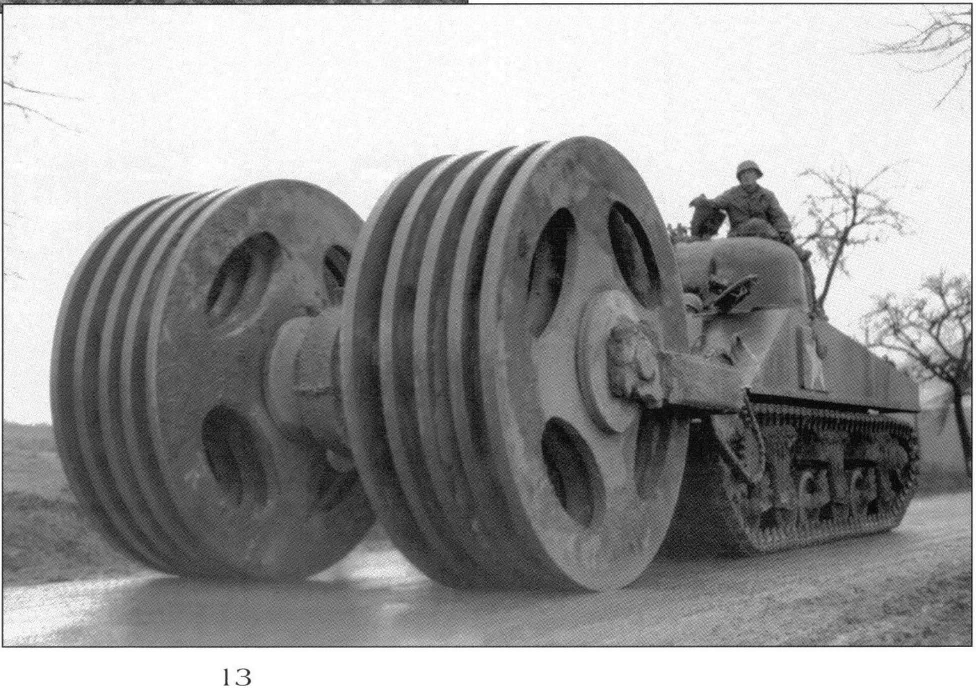
Another view of a M4 tank supporting the 83rd Division while clearing out Gurzenich on 17 December. This may be a M4A3E2 assault tank, although precise identification of the type is made difficult by the camouflage on the turret. The commander's cupola has a .30 cal light machine gun mounted. (NARA)

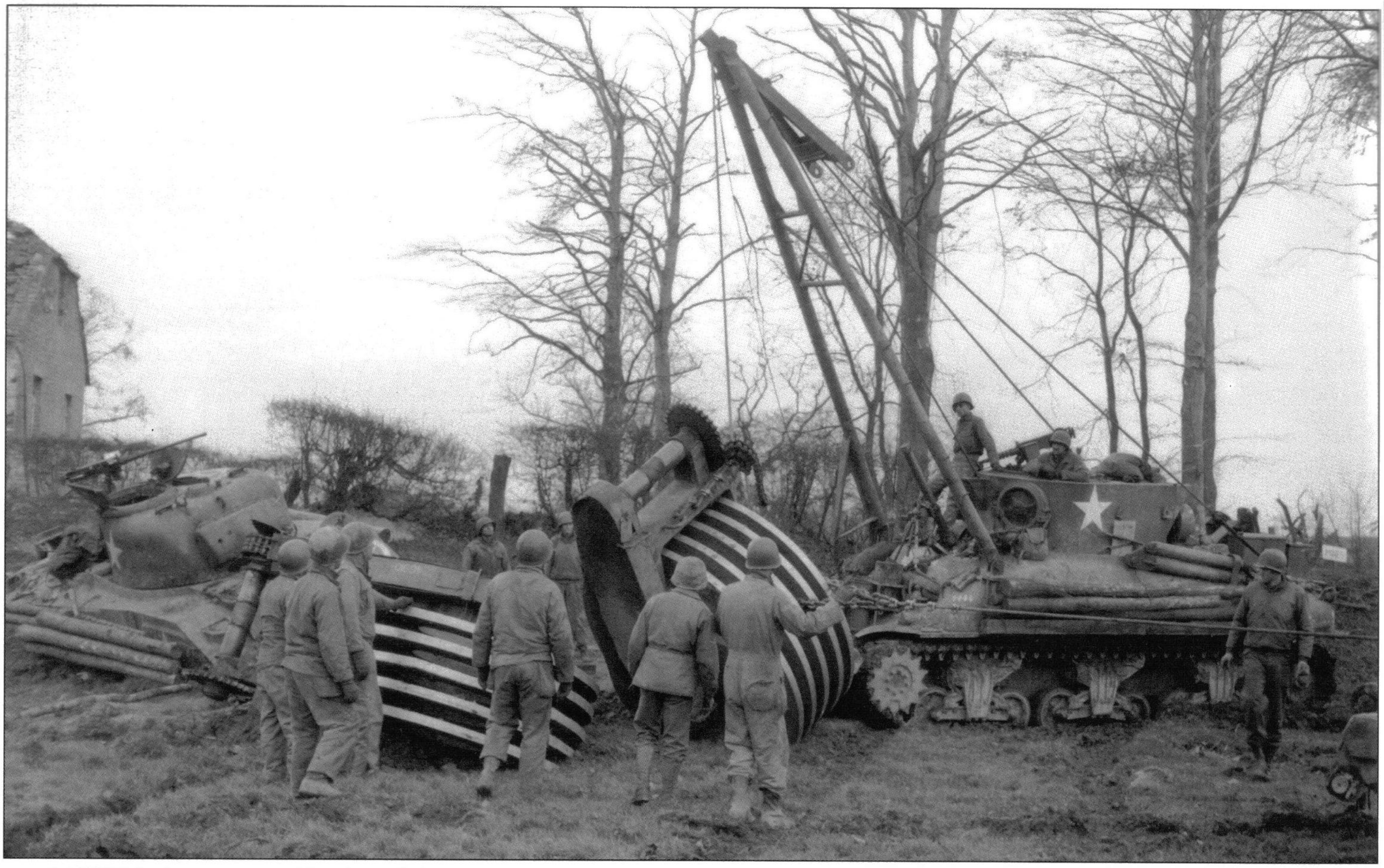




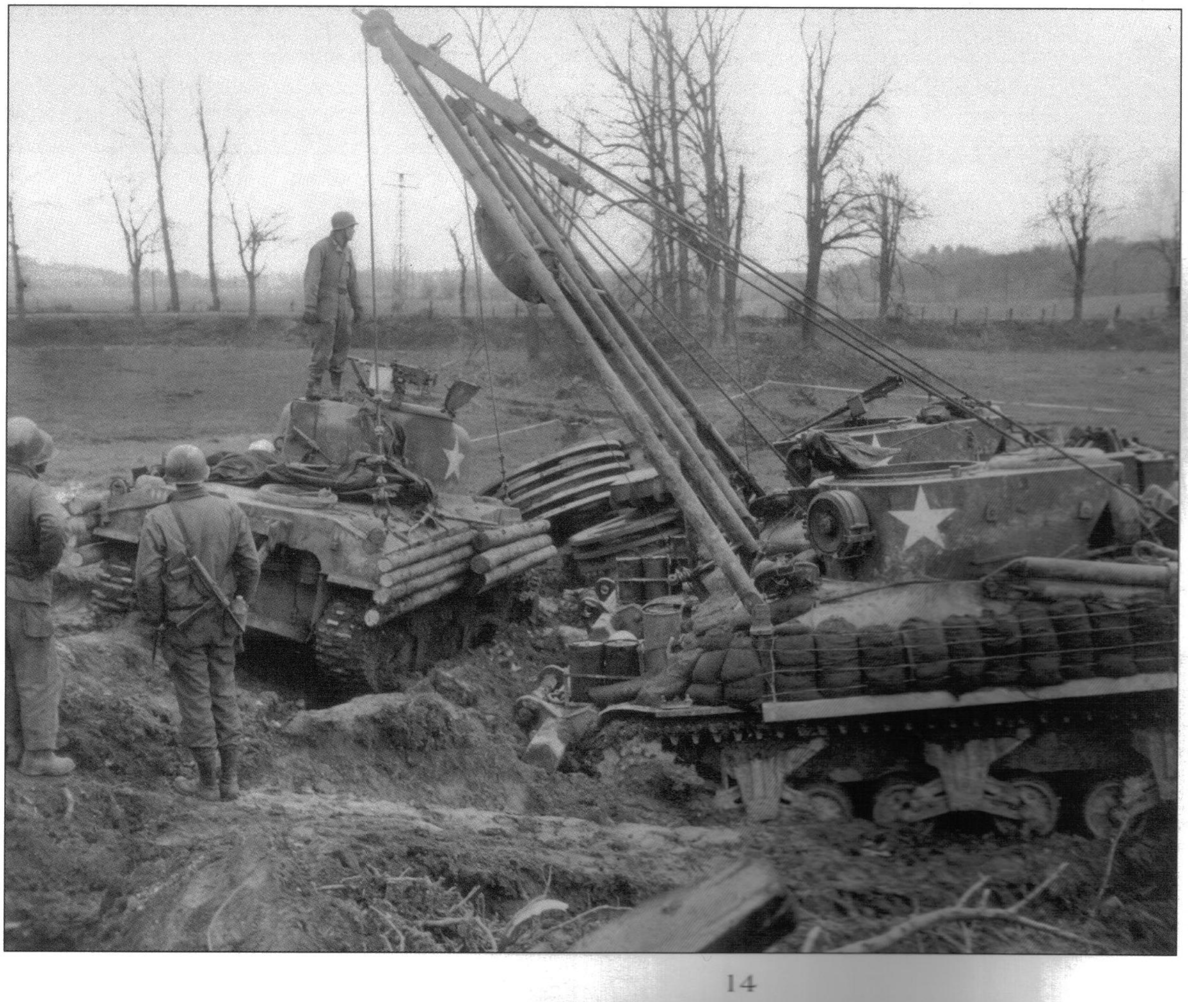
On 11 December 1944 following the Huertgen fighting, some GIs from the 3rd Armored Division look at a heavily camouflaged StuG.III Ausf.G knocked out in the fighting around Obergeich the day before in an encounter with the 33rd Armored Regiment. (NARA)

A M4 tank fitted with a T1E3 "Aunt Jemima" mine roller moves down a road along the German border while supporting the 30th Infantry Division on 10 December 1944. The 739th Tank Battalion was one of two battalions specifically configured for mine clearing operations and had one company with 18 T1E1 mine rollers, two companies with 12 T1E3 mine rollers, and 6 dozer tanks. (NARA)



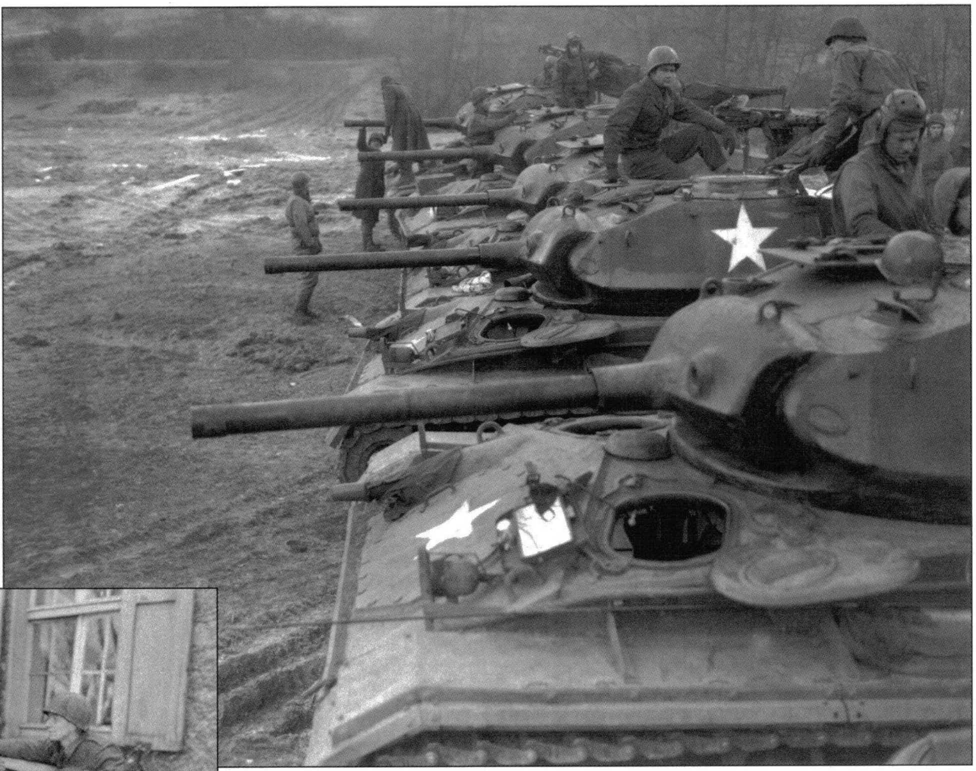


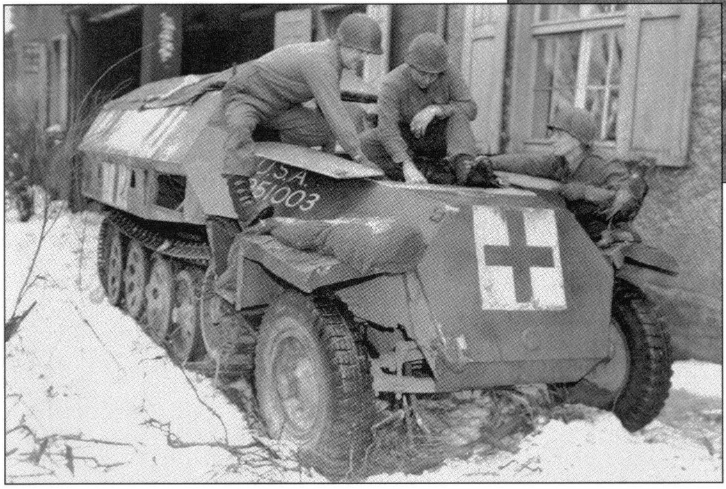
A M32B1 tank recovery vehicle tries to help extricate a T1E3 mine roller of the 739th Tank Battalion that has become bogged down while conducting mine clearance operations for the 30th Infantry Division on 19 December 1944. The weight of these mine rollers was one of their main drawbacks, especially in the muddy weather typical of the autumn of 1944 along the German frontier. (NARA)



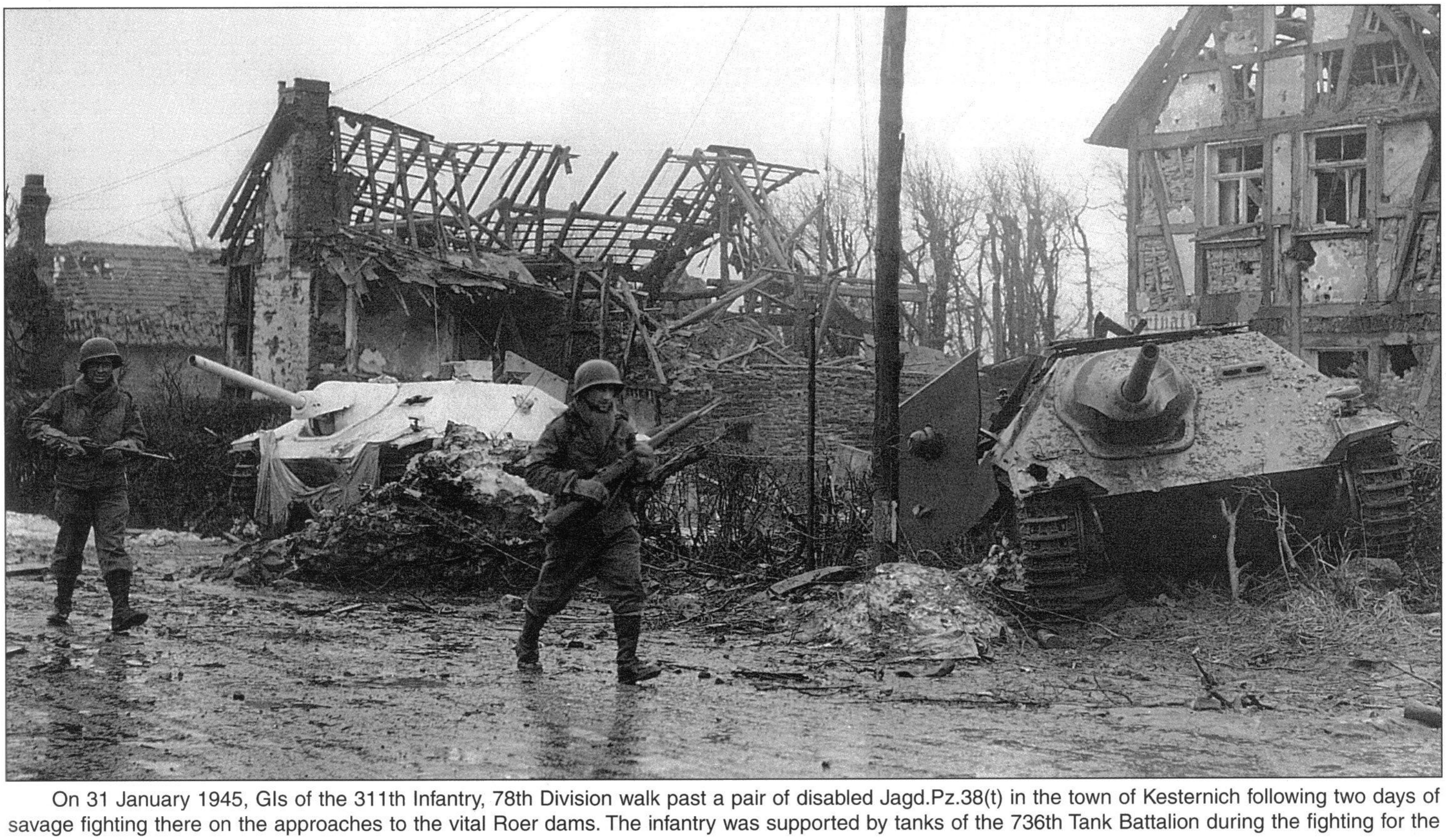
When one M32B1 did not prove enough to move the disabled M4 and T1E3 mine roller combination, another M32 was brought in to assist. It has been fitted with sand-bags for added protection. Notice also that the M4 tank has a section or corduroy matting on the hull side. (NARA)

The new M24 light tank began to arrive in small numbers around Christmas 1944. It was intended to replace the M5A1 light tank. This is from a batch of tanks being prepared at Kornelmunster, Germany on 26 December 1944. (NARA)

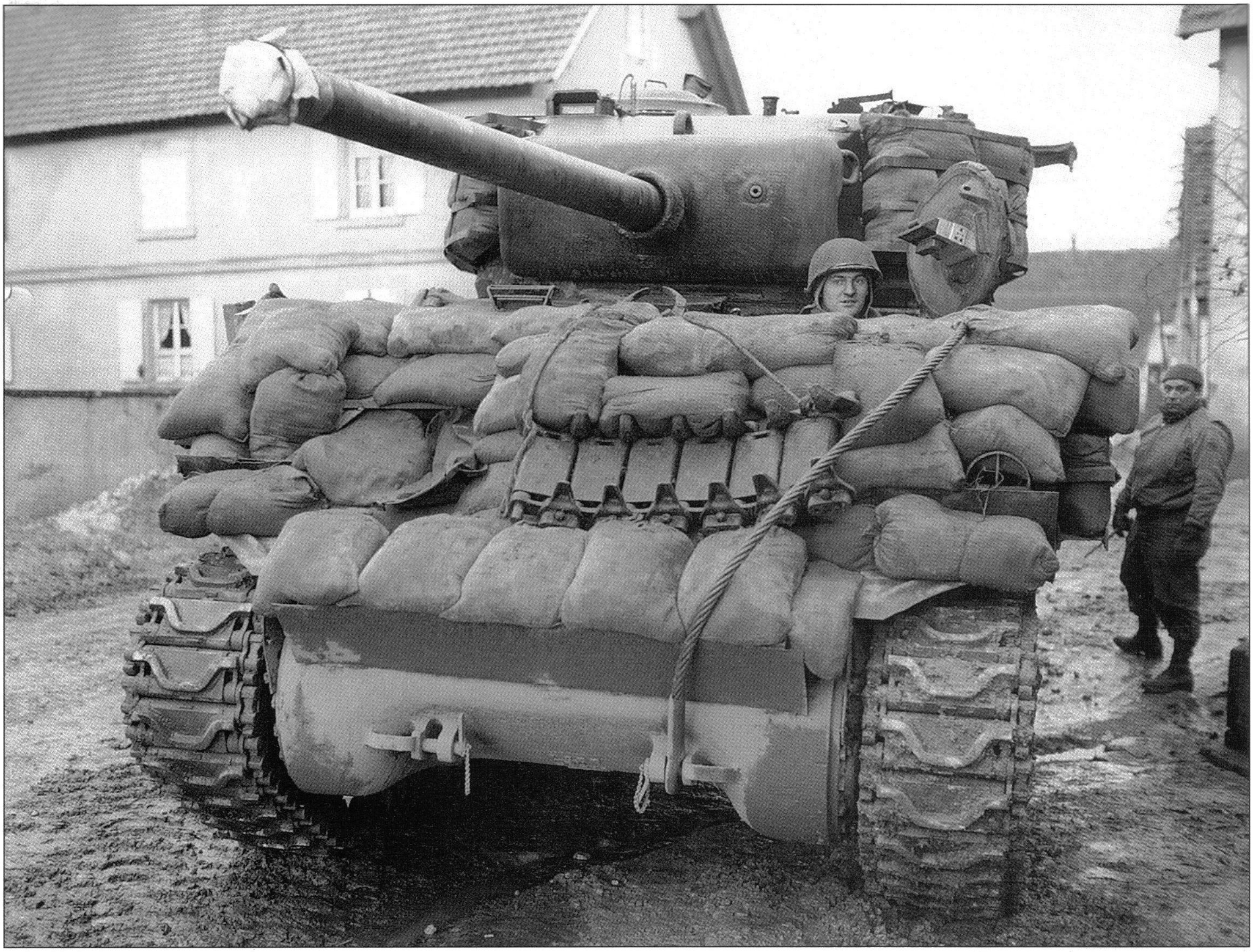


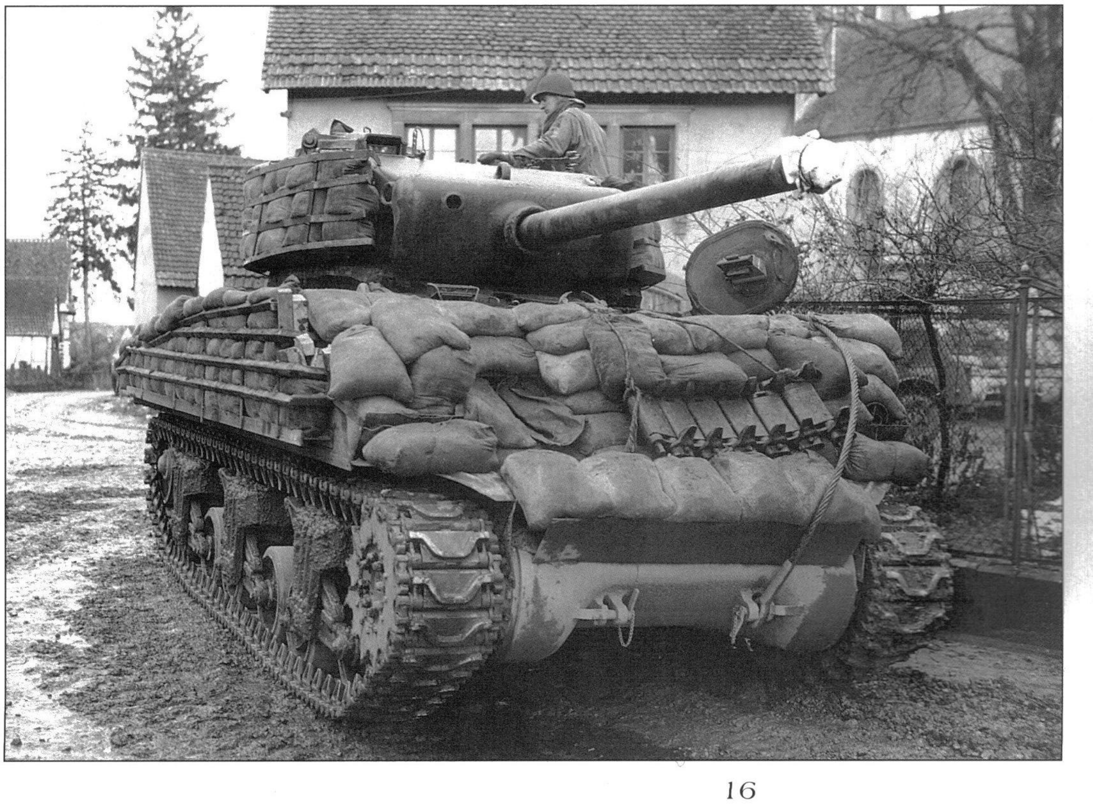


A number of Sd.Kfz.251 half-tracks were captured by the US Ninth Army north of the Ardennes, and they were often pressed into service if still serviceable. This one is being used by the 497th Medical Detachment on 17 January 1945, after being repainted olive drab and marked with Red Cross insignia and a US registration number. (USMA)



On 31 January 1945, GIs of the 311th Infantry, 78th Division walk past a pair of disabled Jagd.Pz.38(t) in the town of Kesternich following two days of savage fighting there on the approaches to the vital Roer dams. The infantry was supported by tanks of the 736th Tank Battalion during the fighting for the town.

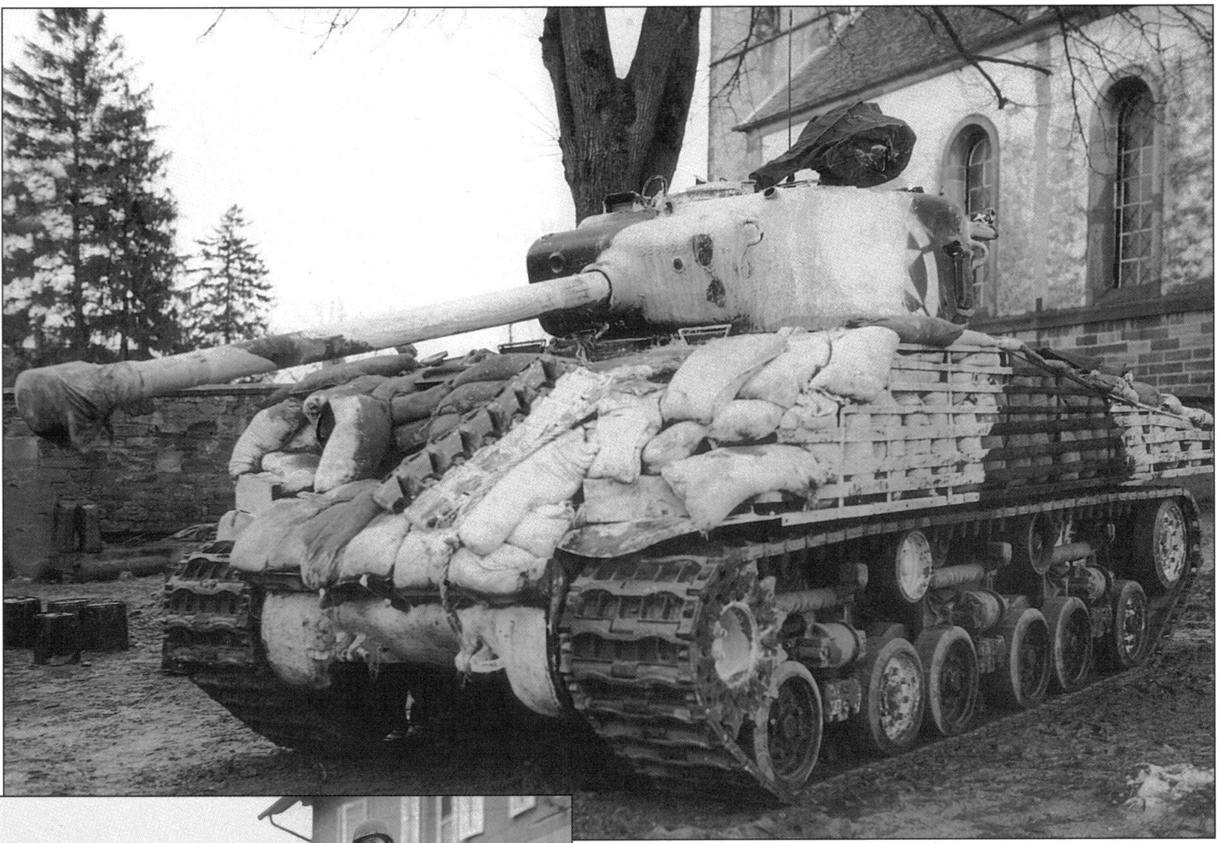


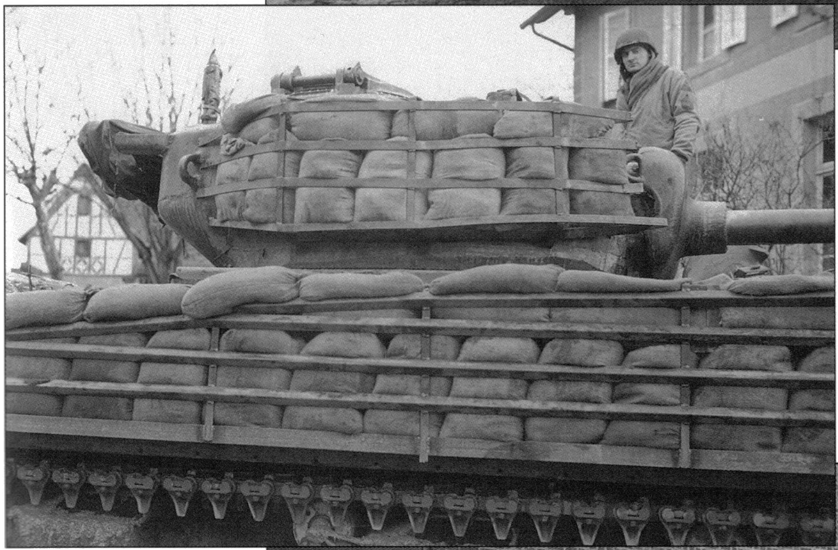


Dissatisfaction over the poor armor protection of the M4 tank led many US units to add improvised armor to the front of their tanks, most often sand-bags. The most elaborate of these were the efforts by the 14th Armored Division in February-March 1945 where divisional workshops prepared a kit including shelves and frames to hold the sandbags to the side of the hull and turret. (NARA)

Another view of a M4A3 (76mm) of the 14th Armored Division showing the configuration of the sandbags on the hull side. Some weeks later, the division began repainting their unit bumper codes on the gun barrels, a practice unique to this division. (NARA)

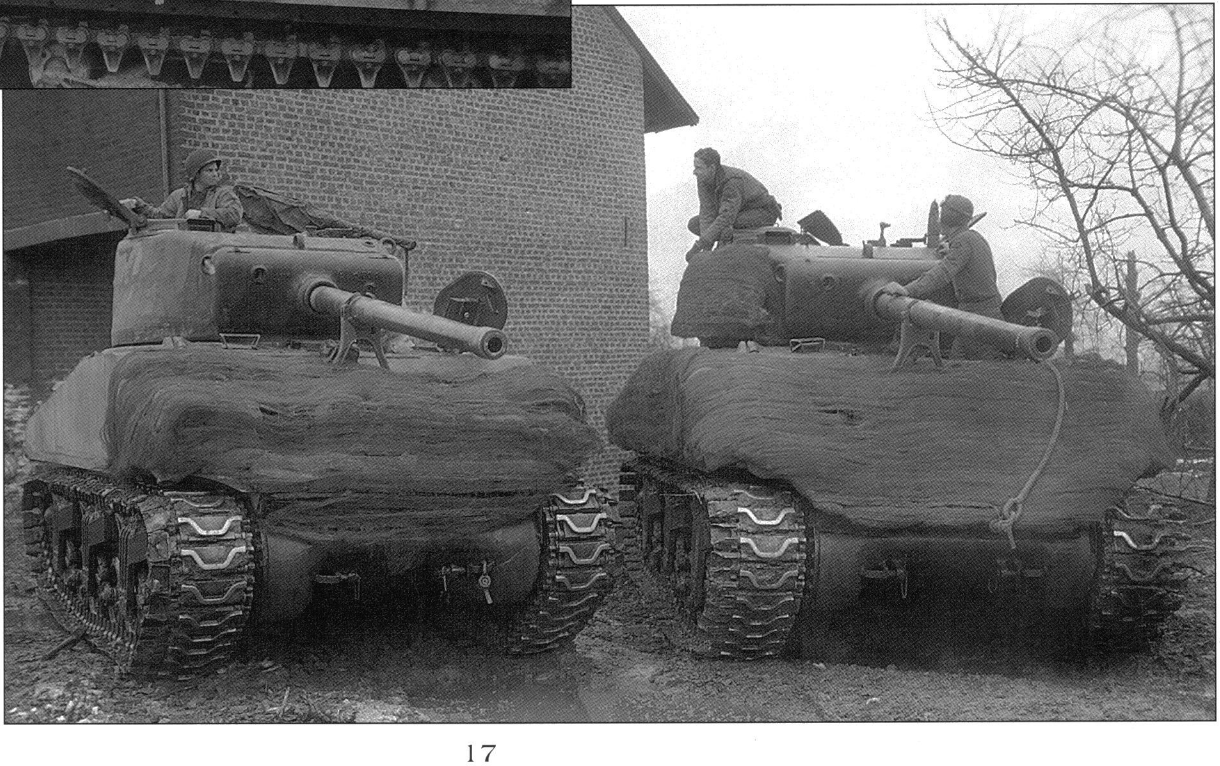
Some of the first tanks of the 14th Armored Division with the added sand-bag armor in February 1945 also were camouflage painted with bands of whitewash over the usual olive drab finish like this M4A3E8 (76mm). (NARA)

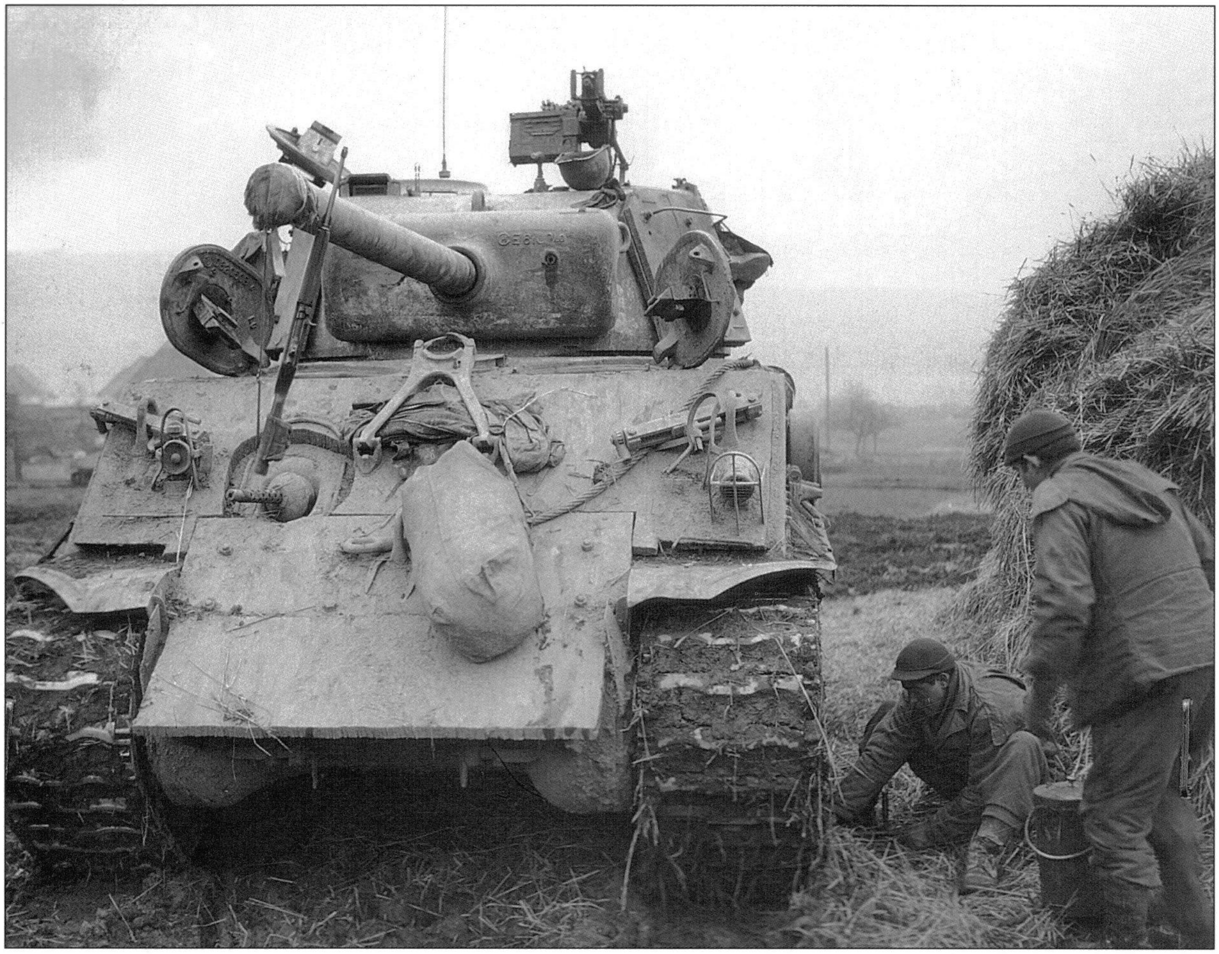




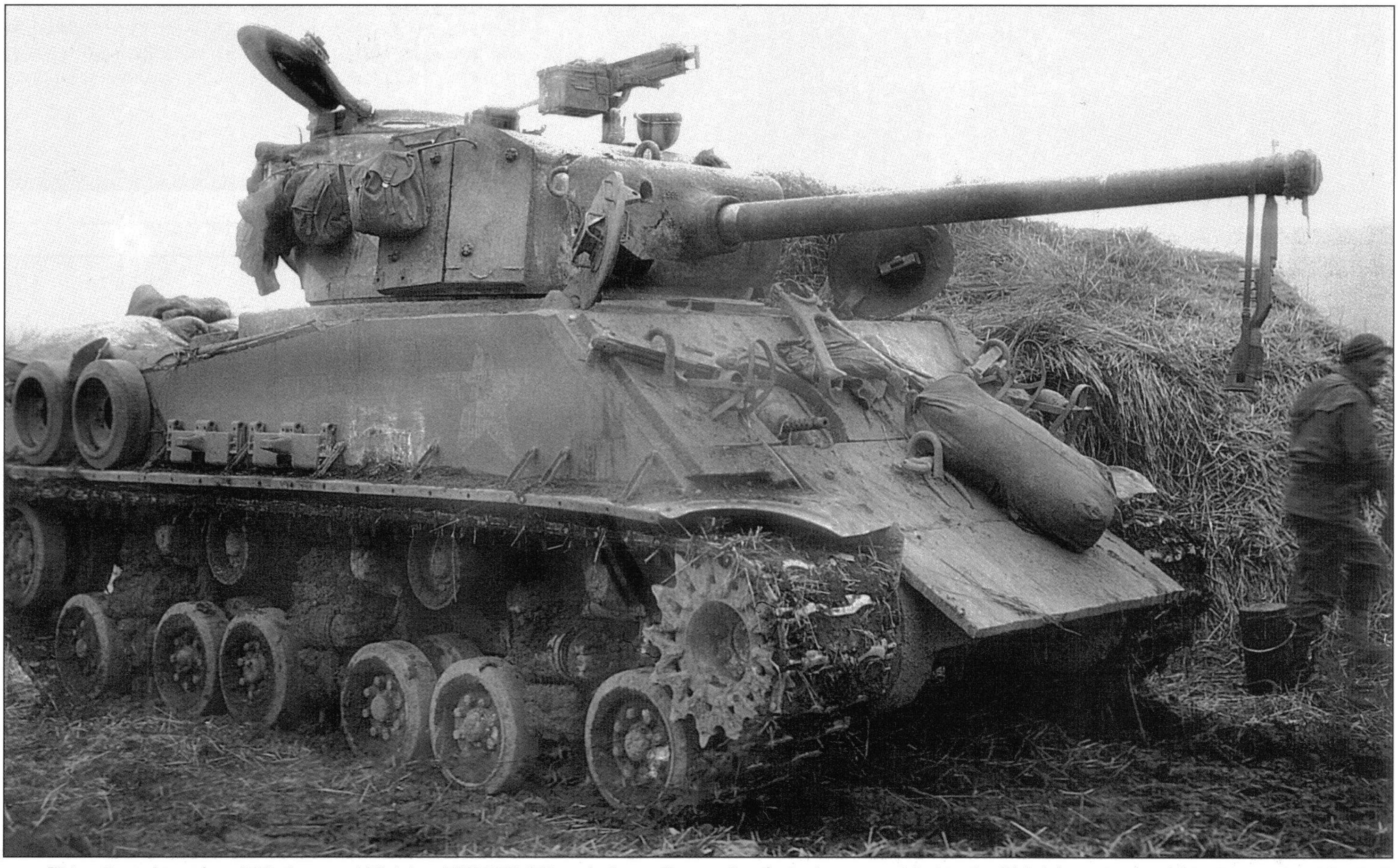
This detail shot shows how the sand-bags were stacked on the vehicle side. In March, many tanks were also camouflage painted during this process in a scheme of black over olive drab.

Ordnance units of the Ninth Army developed an armor appliqué consisting of steel track welded to the armor covered with sandbags and a final cover of camouflage net as seen on these M4A3 (76mm) of the 747th Tank Battalion near Schleiden, Germany on 31 January 1945. This appliqué was also commonly seen on tanks of the 2nd Armored Division in early 1945. (NARA)

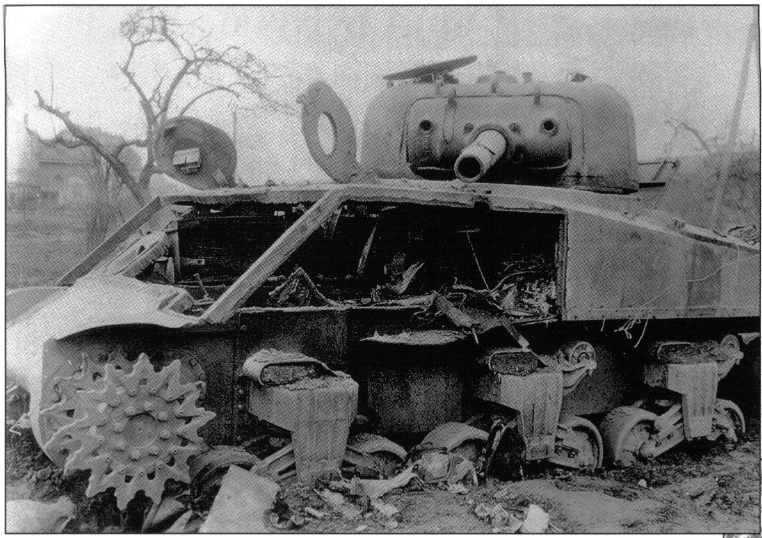




Ordnance officers of Patton's Third Army discouraged the use of sand-bag armor, but the outcry after the heavy tank losses in the Battle of the Bulge led to the development of other expedients. In February 1945, the ordnance units began stripping knocked out US and German tanks of armor plate and welding it to the glacis plate and turret front of about 110 tanks, with priority given to M4A3E8 (76mm) and M4A3 (76mm). The three armored divisions with Patton's Third Army, the 4th, 6th and 11th, each received 36 of these, this particular example serving with 11th Armored Division. (NARA)

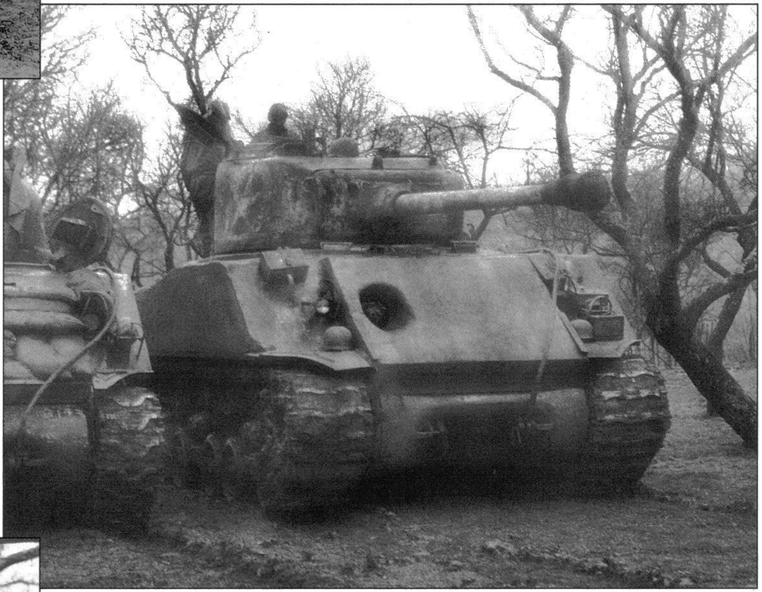


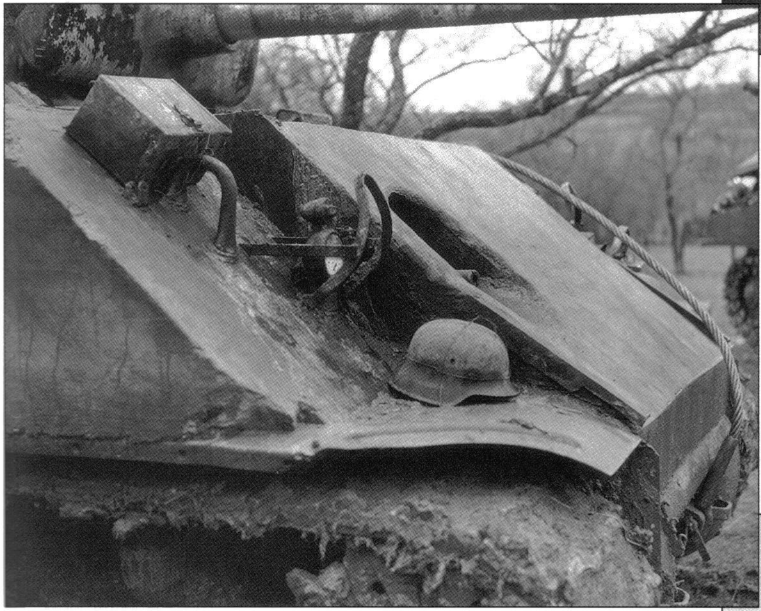
This other view of an 11th Armored Division M4A3E8 (76mm) shows the appliqué steel armor added to the Third Army tanks. All tanks received the hull armor, but only some received the turret armor. The glacis armor was often from the glacis plate of a knocked out M4, complete with the associated headlight guards and other features. (NARA)



This is an example of a knocked out M4 105mm assault tank that has been cannibalized for armor for the Third Army up-armoring effort. In March 1945, the Third Army acquired another batch of derelict M4 tanks from the US Seventh Army, and did a second round of up-armoring. (NARA)

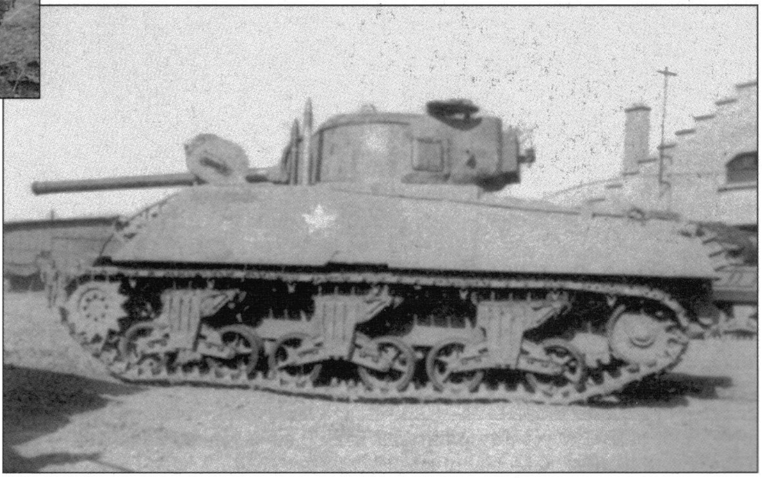
The ordnance officers of the 12th Armored Division were not entirely convinced of the value of sand-bag armor and so developed a local expedient in February-March 1945 using concrete applied over the glacis plate and hull sides with steel rebar for internal reinforcement. (NARA)

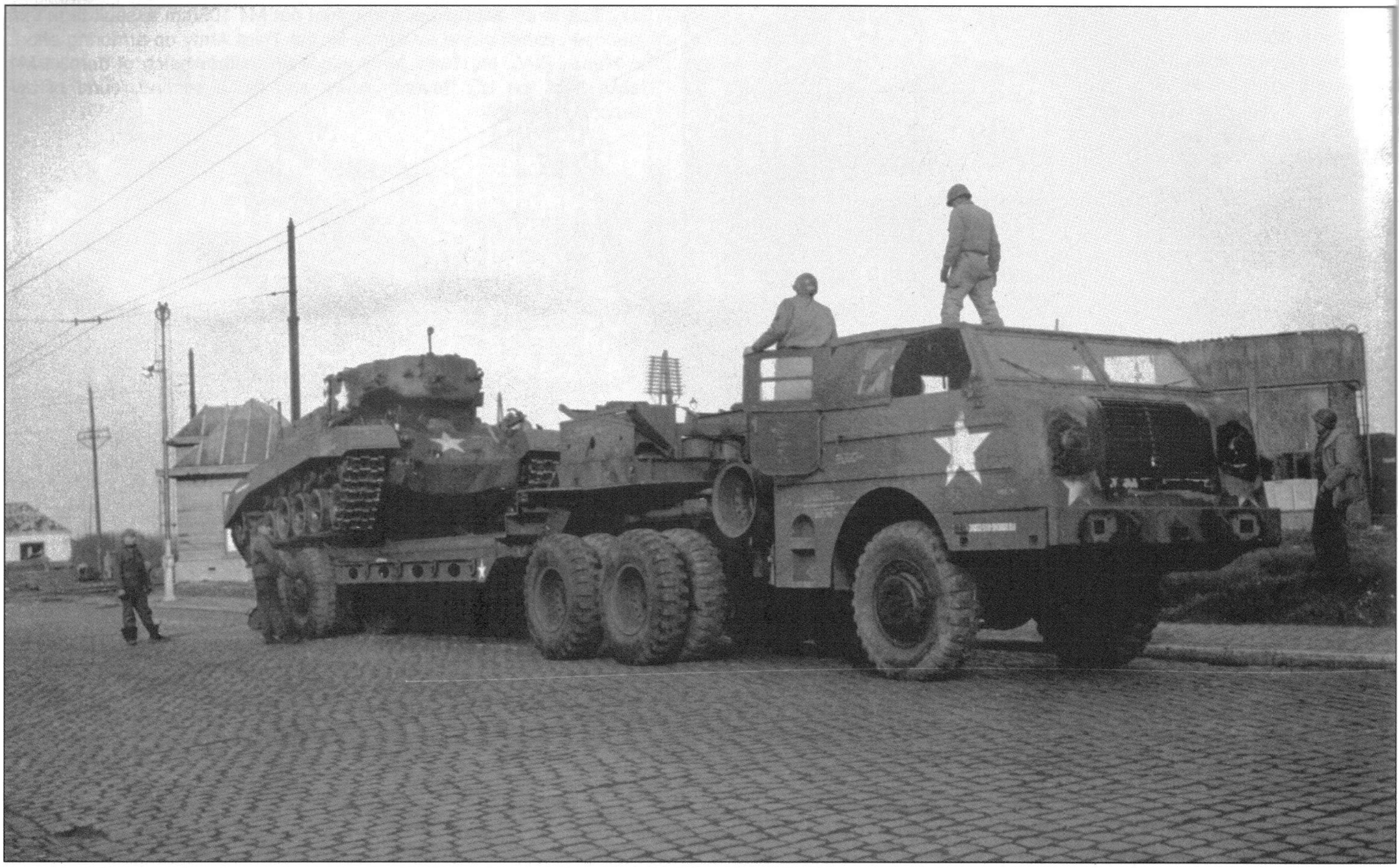




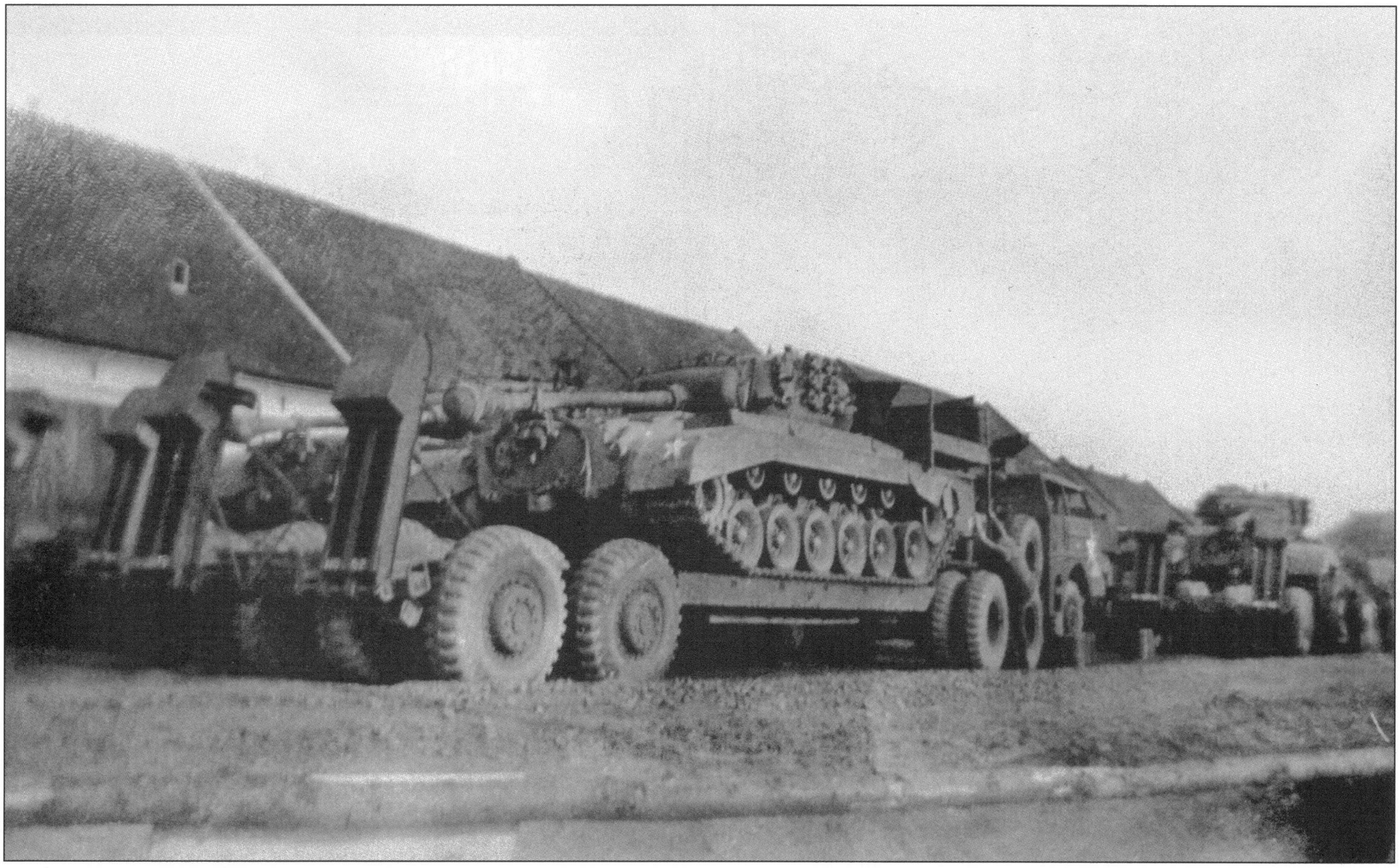
This close-up shows the thick layer of concrete that was fitted to some tanks from 12th Armored Division in February-March 1945 by divisional ordnance units. A tunnel was left for the hull machine gun. (NARA)

Patton's Third Army decided to re-arm their 75mm M4 tanks with the 76mm gun, and a single M4A3 pilot was completed by Ordnance in February 1945. The conversion required the addition of a large slab of steel on the rear of the turret to act as a counter-weight. Although feasible, the arrival of large numbers of M4A3 (76mm) made the conversions unnecessary, and the program was halted before any more conversions were done. The accumulated 76mm guns were used to rearm about a hundred M4A3E2 assault tanks.

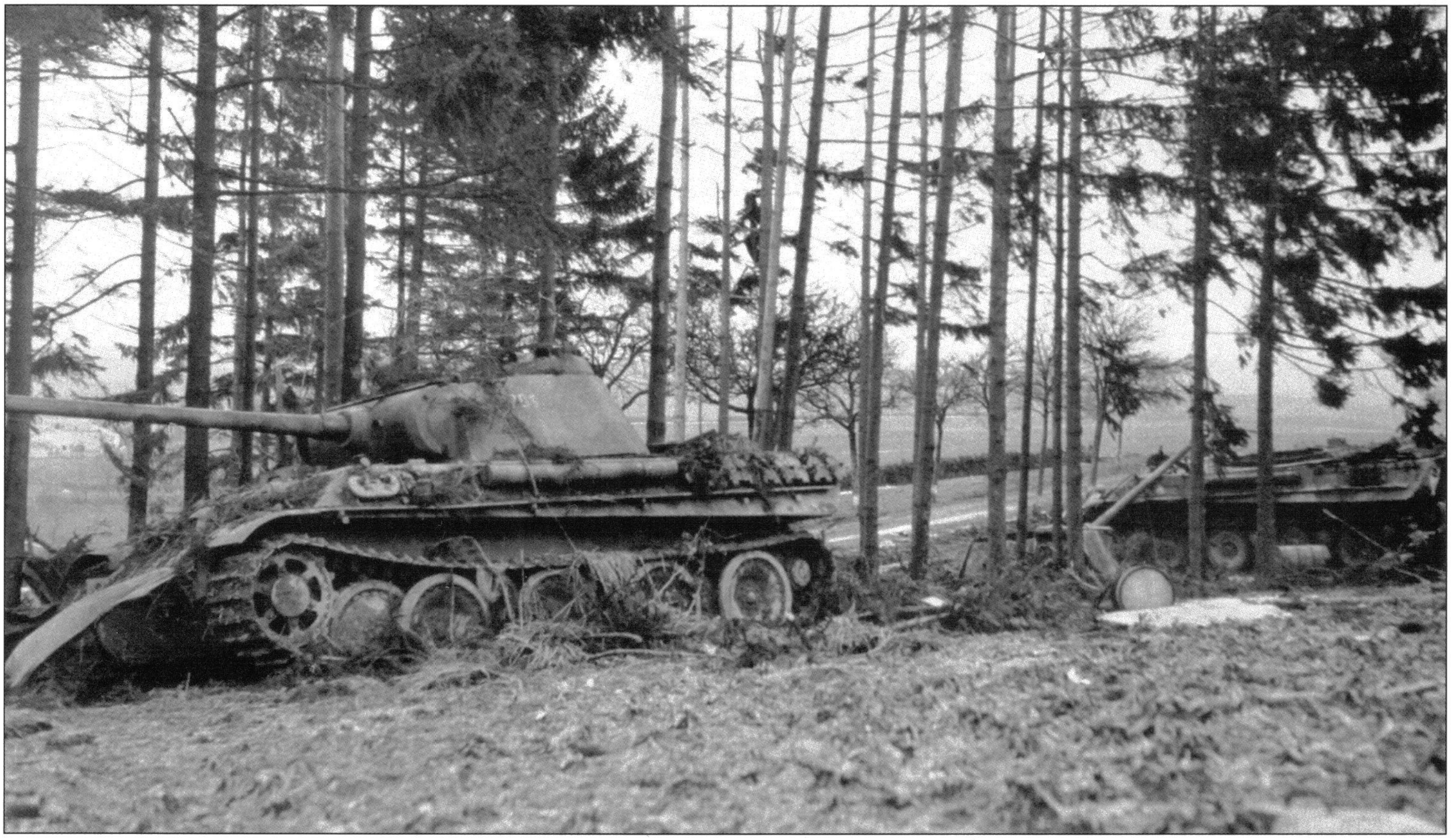




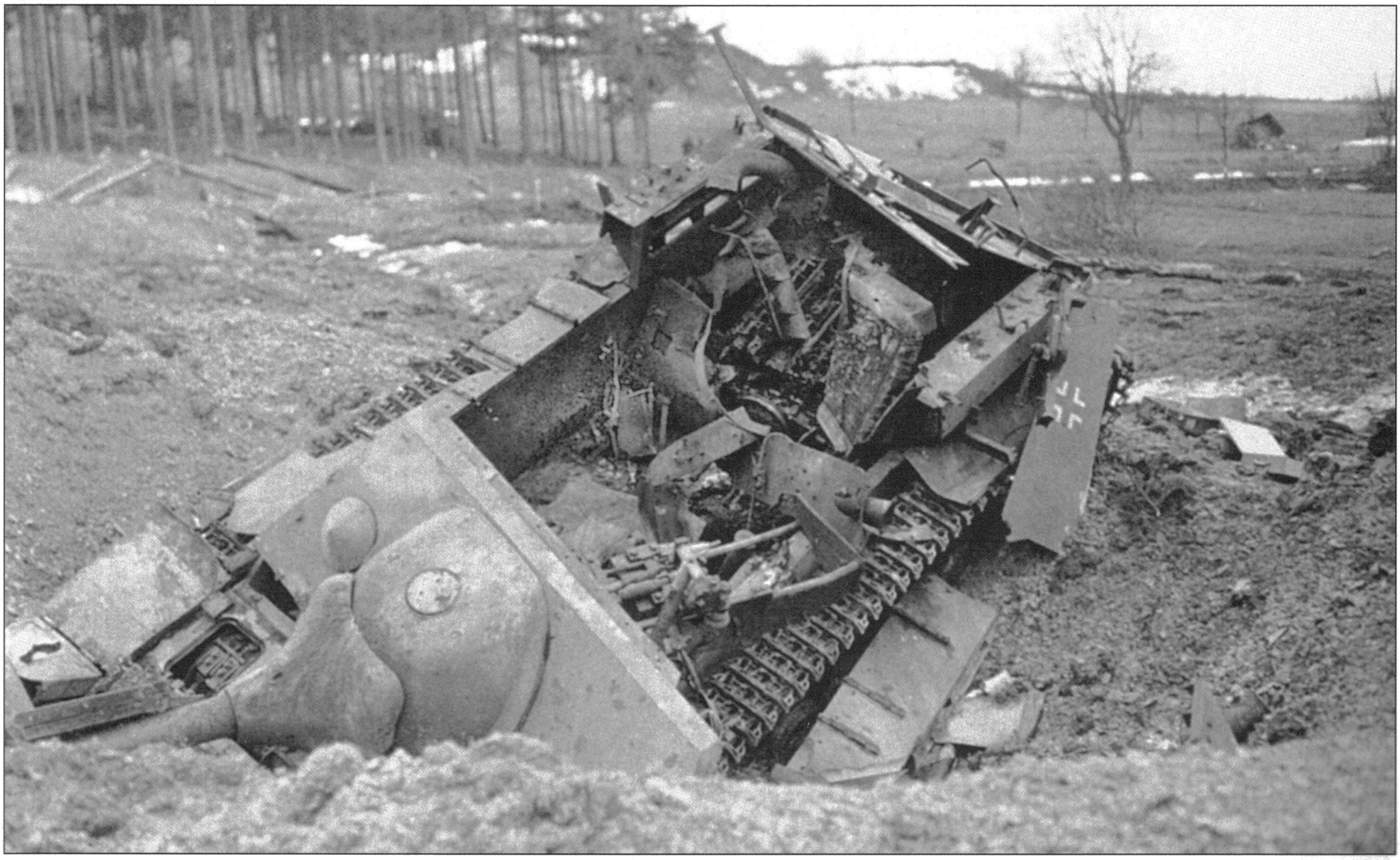
Much to the relief of some tank crews, the first shipment of twenty T26E3 tanks arrived at the port of Antwerp in early February with the Zebra mission. This is one of the Pershing tanks being loaded on to a M25 tank transporter in Antwerp harbor on 9 February 1945, using one of the less often seen M26A1 unarmored tractors. (NARA)



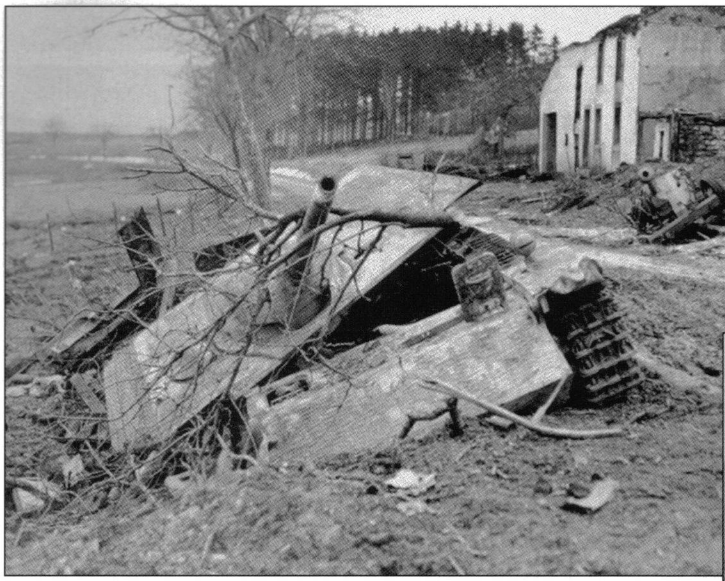
A pair of M25 tank transporters with T26E3 tanks loaded aboard bring them to the 3rd and 9th Armored Divisions for conversion training at the end of February 1945. (Patton Museum)



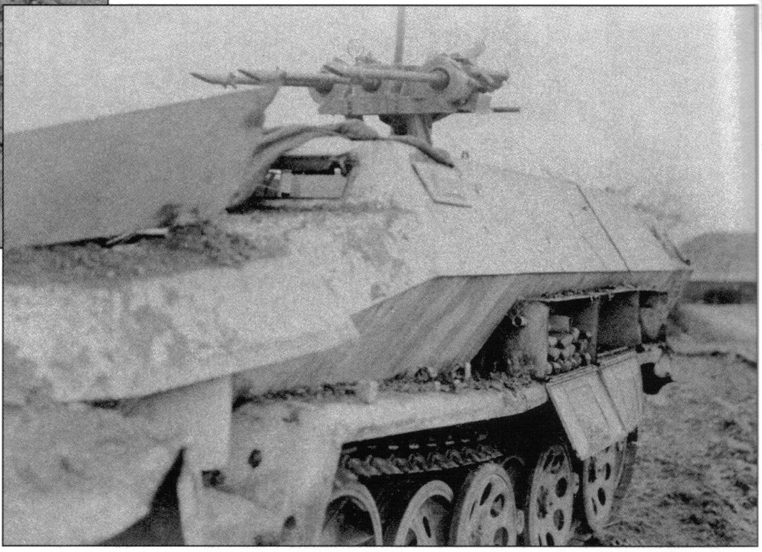
A pair of Panther Ausf.G tanks from 2.Panzer-Division knocked out in the fighting around Marnach on the German/Luxembourg frontier during the battles for the Our river on 6 February 1945 with the 6th Armored Division. The February fighting for the Vianden bulge was the final phase of the Ardennes counter-offensive aimed at pushing through the Siegfried line into Germany near Bitburg. (NARA)



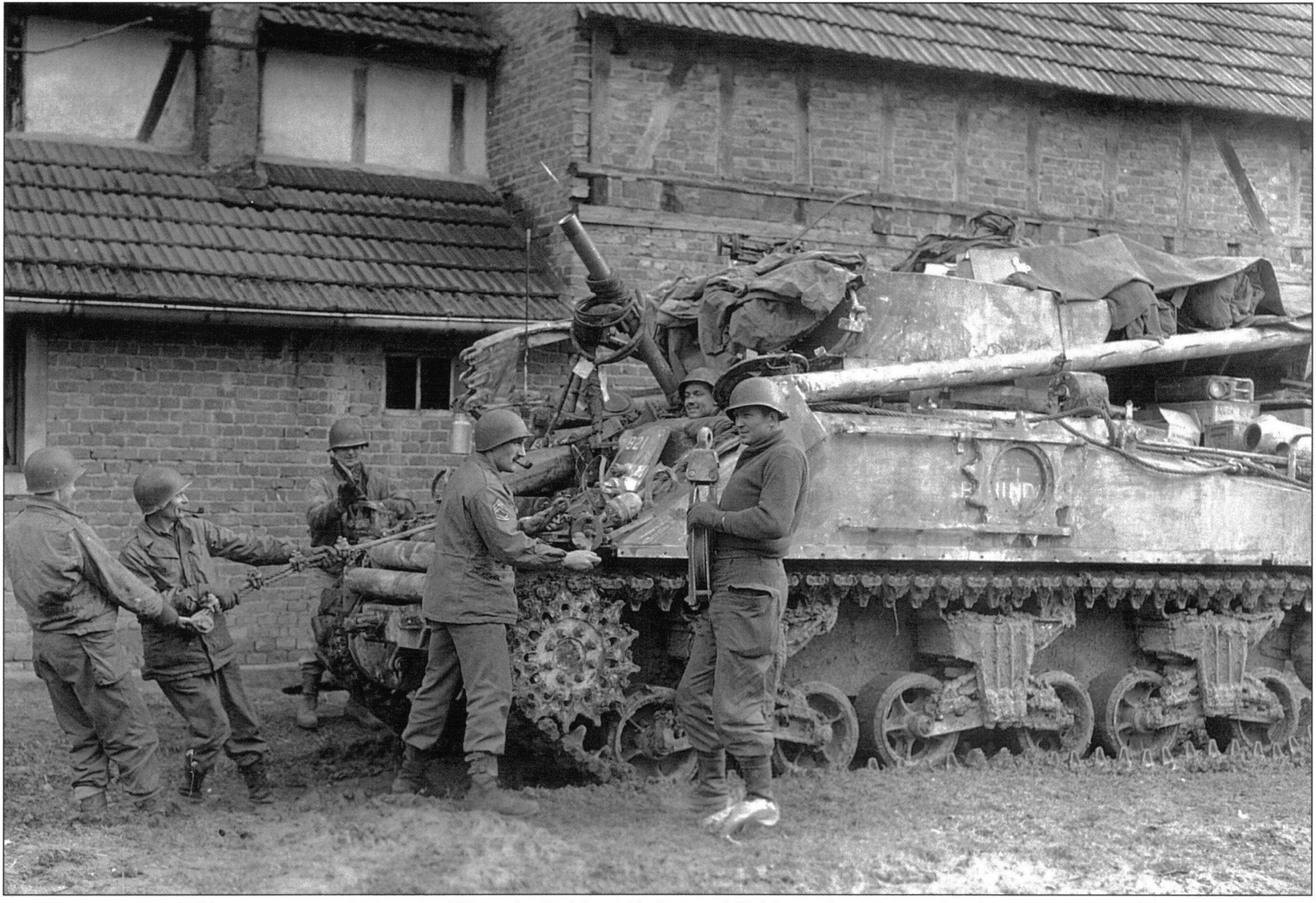
A Pz.IV/70 (V) tank destroyer blown open by an internal ammunition fire lies in a crater near Marnach during the fighting with the 6th Armored Division in early February 1945. (NARA)



Another Pz.IV/70 (V) is seen here in Marnach, a casualty of the fighting along the Our river on the German frontier in early February 1945 with the 6th Armored Division. An internal ammunition fire has blown the superstructure off the hull. Behind it is an abandoned 75mm PaK 40 anti-tank gun.

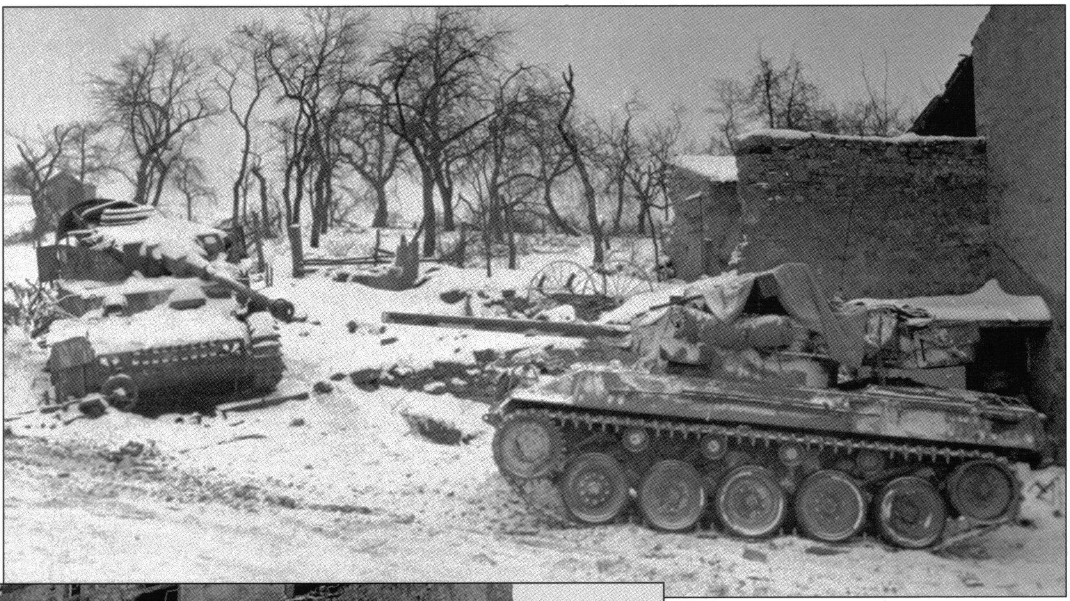


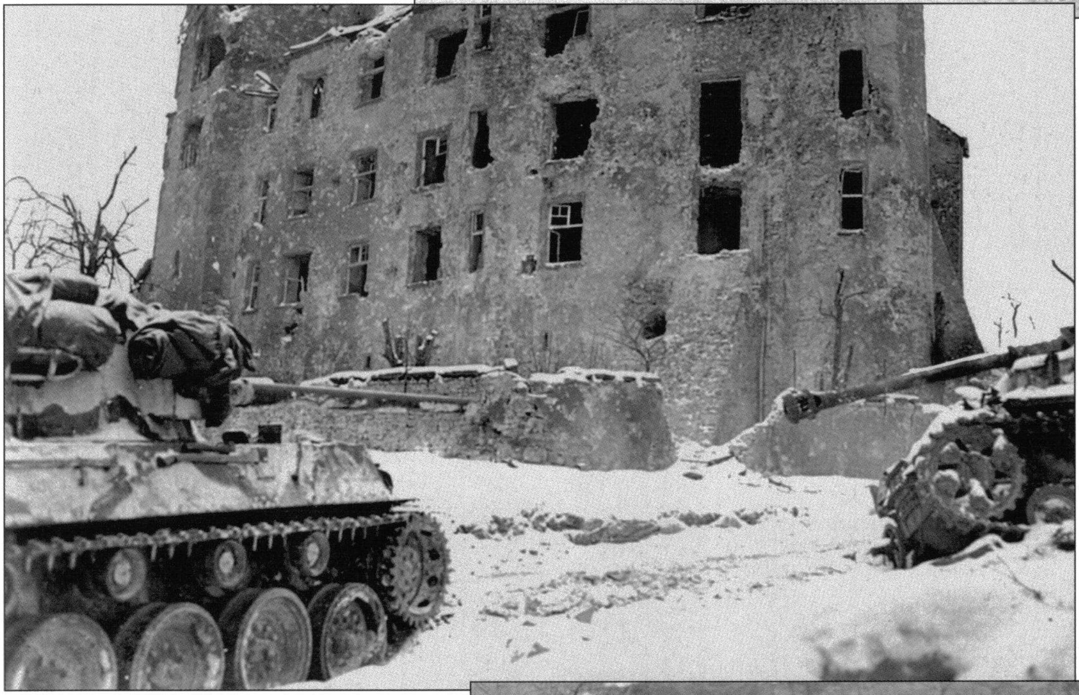
One of the less common versions of the Hanomog armored halftracks was the Sd.Kfz.251/21 armed with a triple Drilling MG151S. This one, abandoned near Kalborn during the fighting along the Luxembourg/German frontier in early February 1945 is missing the usual armored shield around the gun mount. (MHI)



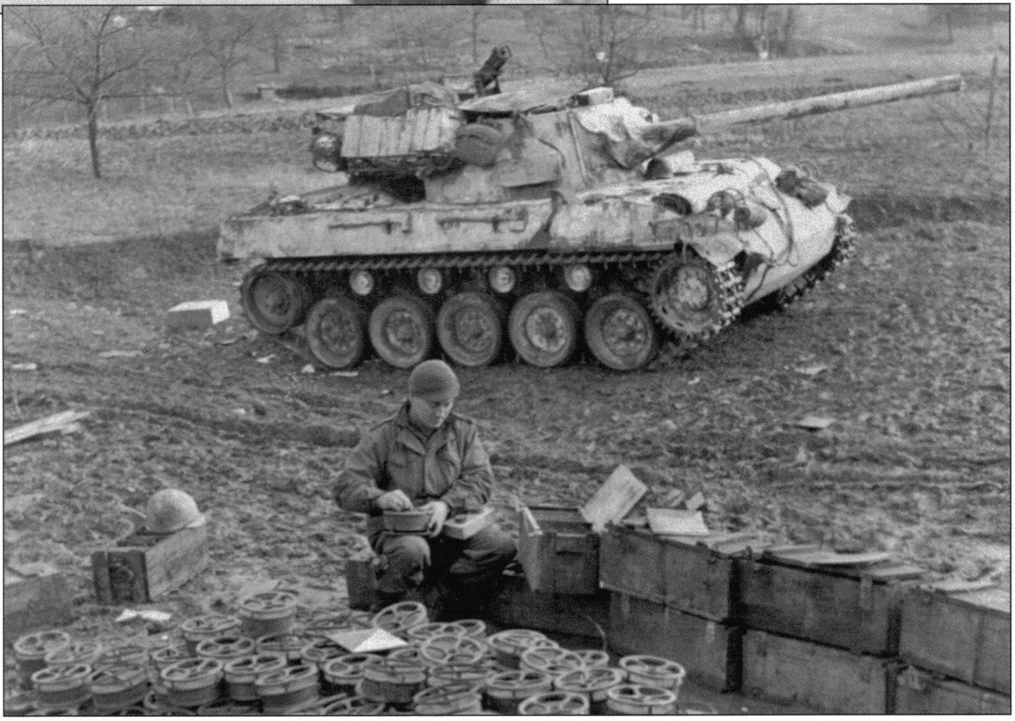
The crew of a M32 tank recovery vehicle named “Boundary” of the 14th Armored Division pull out the winch cable while doing maintenance work near Batzendorf, Germany on 9 February 1945. (NARA)

A M18 76mm GMC of the 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion passes by a derelict Pz.Kpfw.IV in Nennig on 2 February 1945. The M18 has been irregularly painted with whitewash for winter camouflage. (Patton Museum)

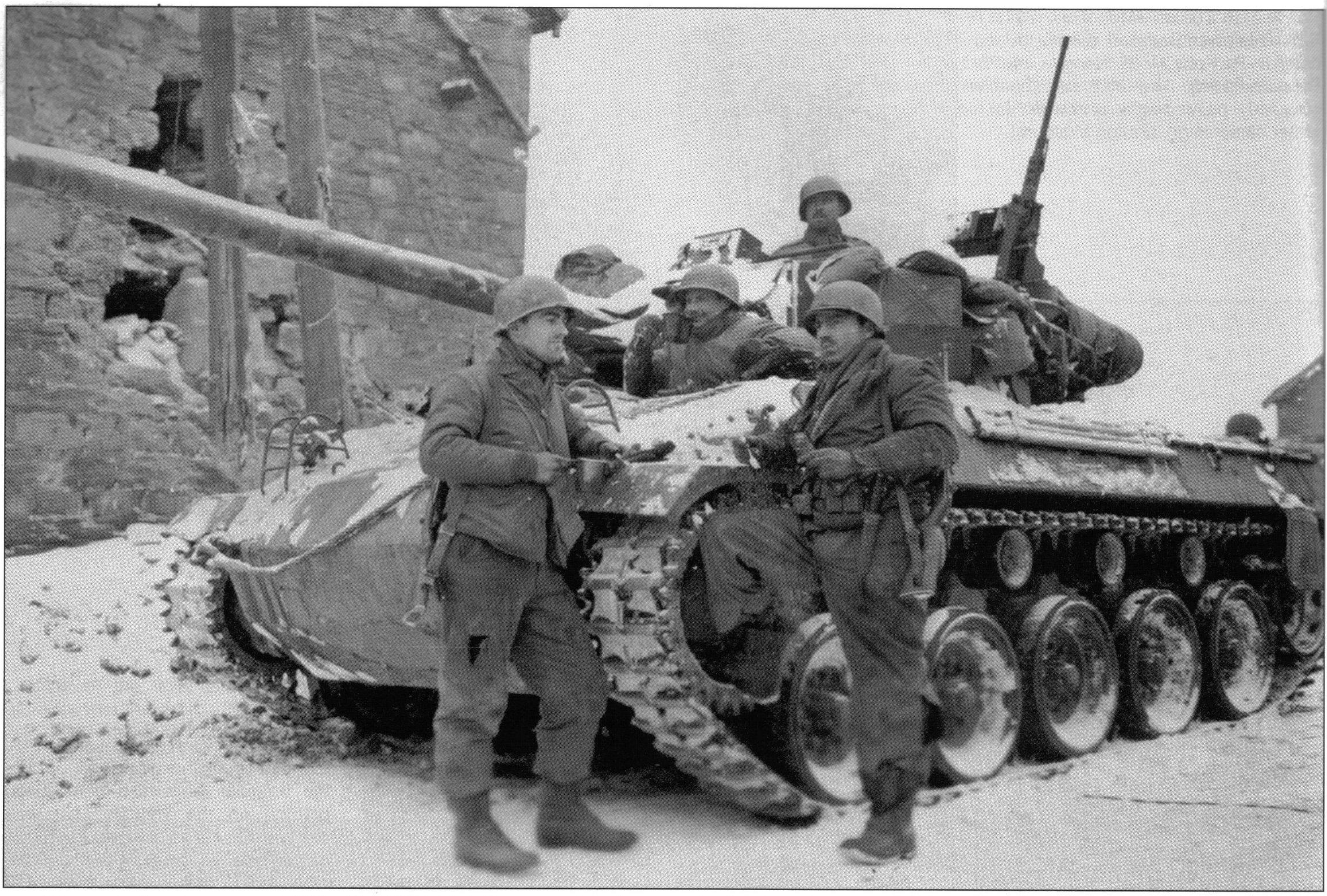




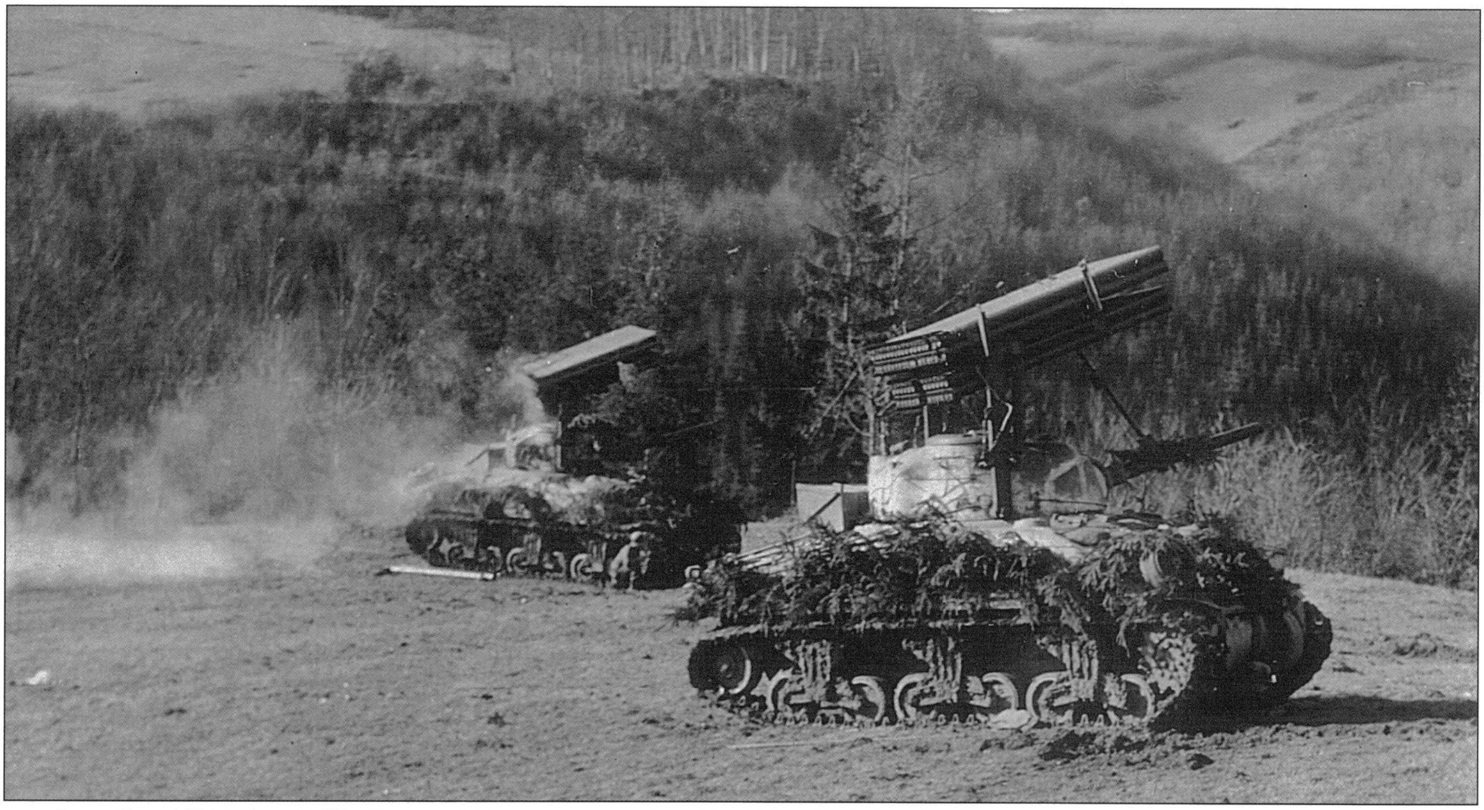
Another view of the same M18, this time from the other side, shows the irregular whitewash camouflage painted on the vehicle. This was actually based on the official winter camouflage scheme ordered by the 12th Army Group which suggested leaving bands of olive drab to break-up the overall whitewash finish.



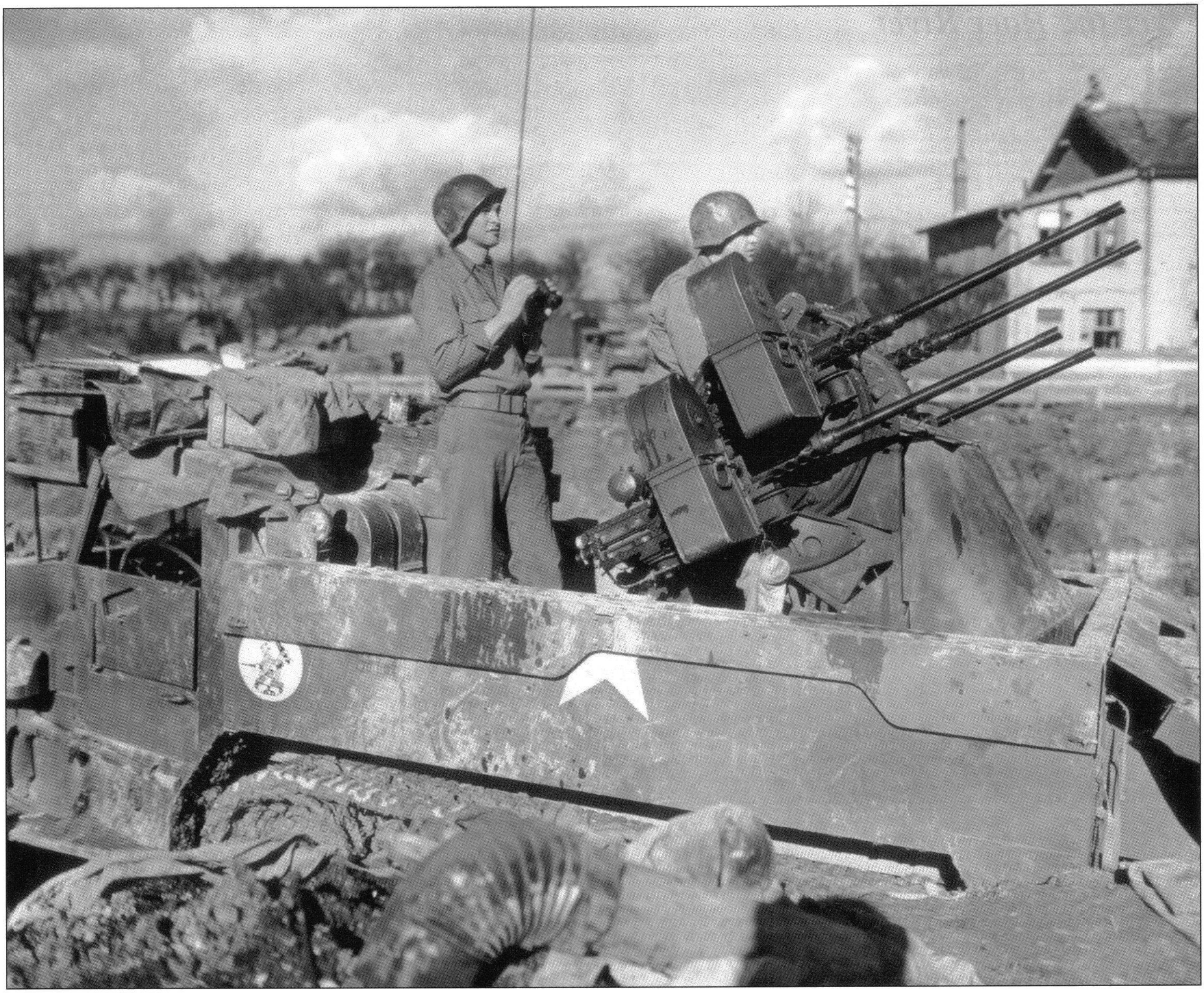
Another M18 of the 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion outside Nennig on 2 February 1945. The GI in the foreground is preparing a stack of M1 anti-tank mines. (Patton Museum)



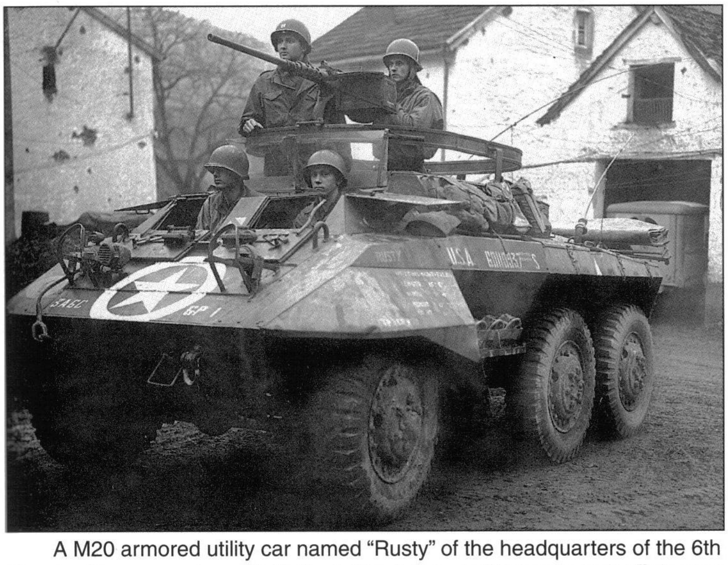
The crew of a snow covered M18 of the 638th Tank Destroyer Battalion, attached to the 5th Armored Division enjoys some hot chow during a lull in the fighting on 15 February 1945 during the attacks towards the Roer river. The division finally crossed the river on 27 February 1945 in the wake of Operation Grenade. (G168)



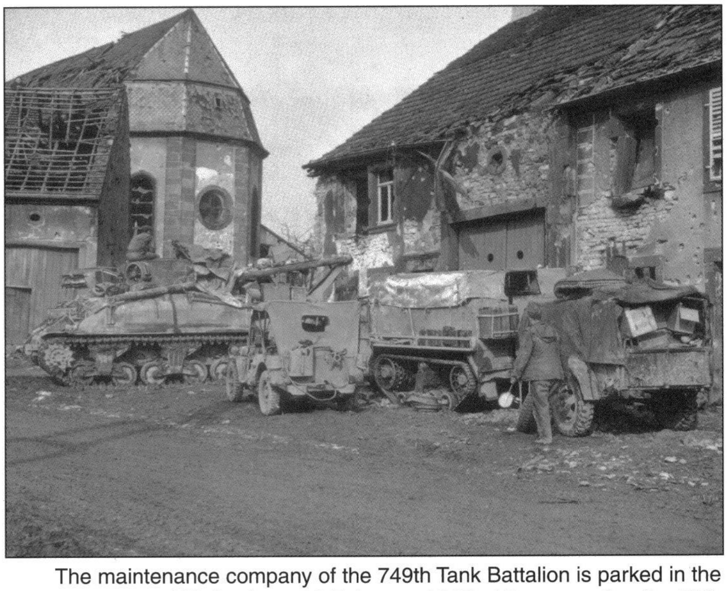
Camouflaged M4 tanks with T34 Calliope 4.5 inch rocket launcher of the 702nd Tank Battalion engage targets near Wallendorf on 16 February 1945 on the approaches to Bitburg. The fighting in the Eifel was the first time that the Calliopes were used in this sector, supporting the 5th and 80th Divisions. (NARA)



A M16 anti-aircraft half-track stands guard duty with the 390th AAA Battalion in Saarlautern on 15 February 1945. Patton's Third Army was bottled up on the approaches to the Siegfried line here in February, finally cracking though the following month. The unit insignia, a cartoon dragon on tracks wielding machine guns, is evident on the hull side. (NARA)

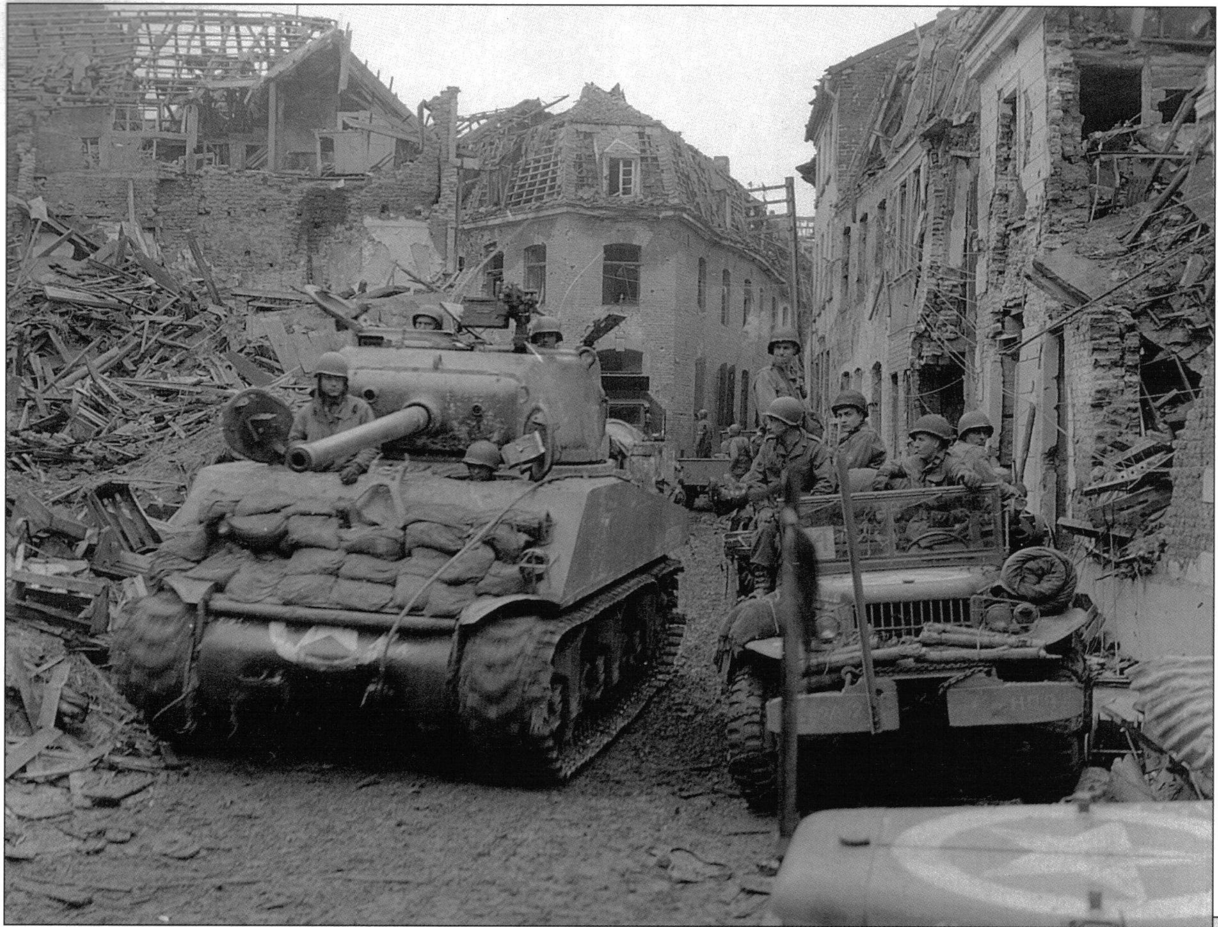


A M20 armored utility car named "Rusty" of the headquarters of the 6th Cavalry Group, serving with Patton's Third Army in Germany on 17 February 1945. The unit has widened the ring mount so that it traverses the whole parapet. They have also added a plastic windshield at the front of the parapet. (NARA)

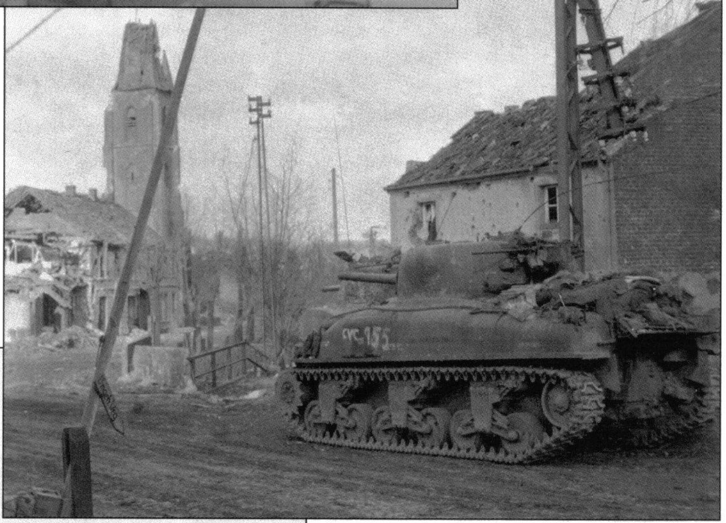


The maintenance company of the 749th Tank Battalion is parked in the shattered town of Kerbach on 22 February 1945 while supporting the 70th Division. To the left is a M32B1 tank recovery vehicle while to the right is a M3 half-track. (NARA)

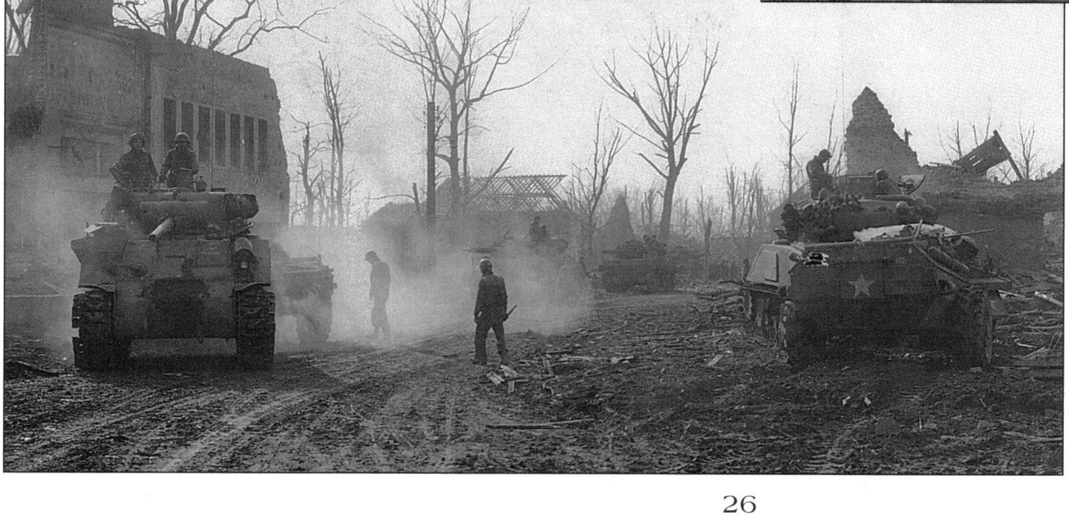
Over the Roer River



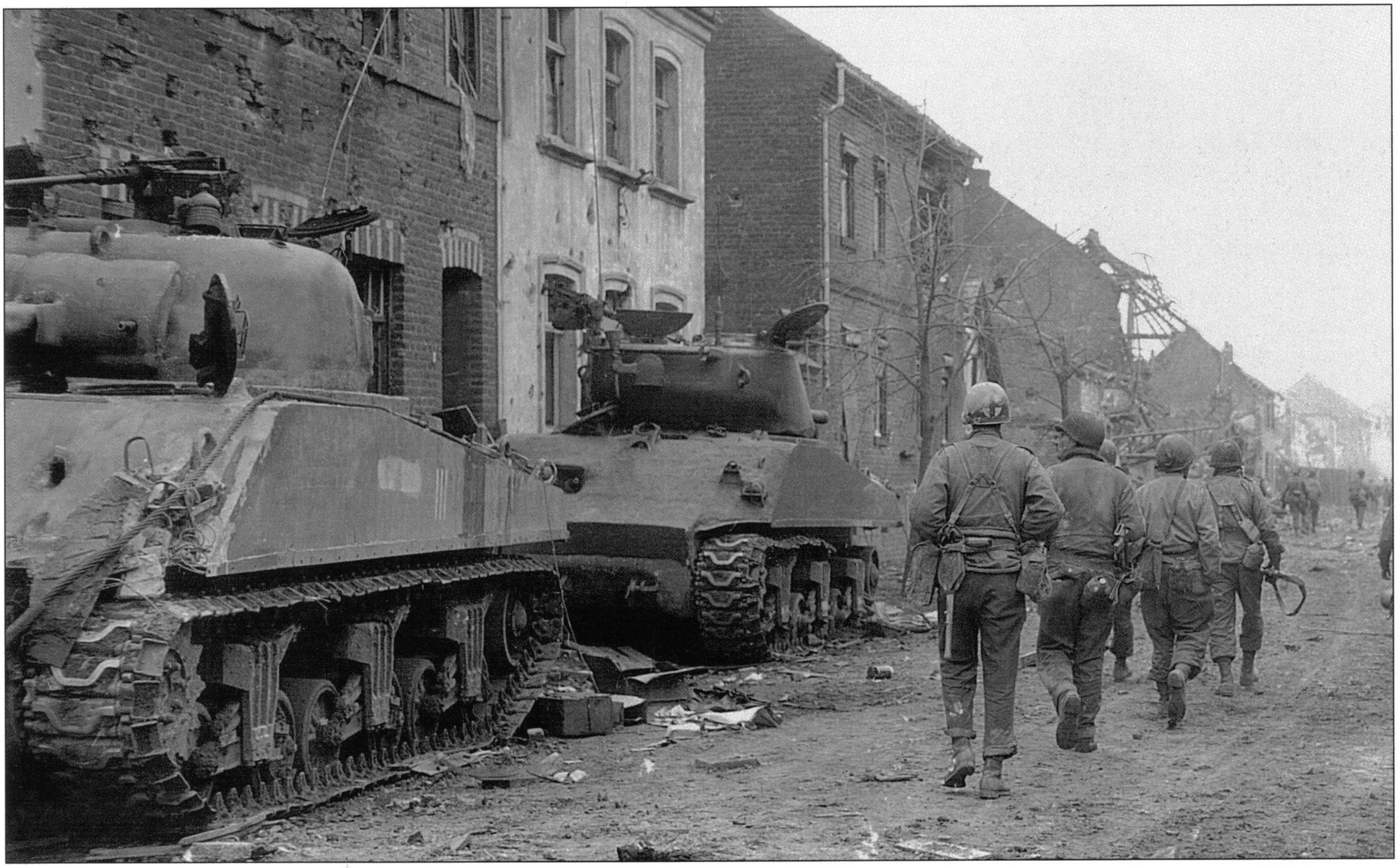
A M4A3 (76mm), probably from the 771st Tank Battalion, leads a column through Linnich on 24 February 1945, the day after the town had been seized by the 84th Division at the start of Operation Grenade. The first vehicular bridge was put across the Roer river hours before, and tanks and tank destroyers were rushed into the town in anticipation of a German counter-attack as both 9. and 11.Panzer-Division were stationed to the west of Cologne. (NARA)



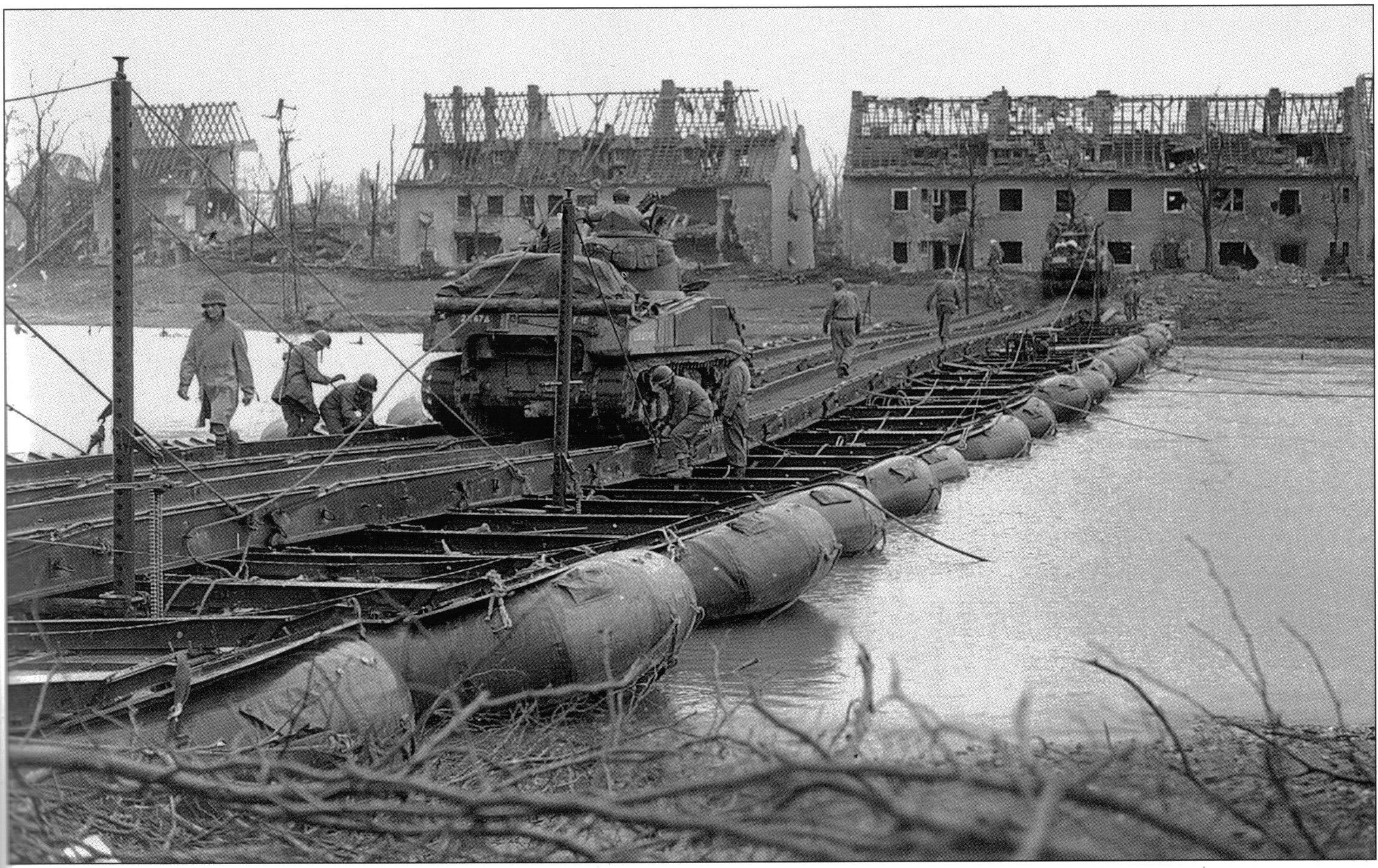
A M4A1 of the 771st Tank Battalion engages targets in the town of Baal during the fighting on the eastern bank of the Roer river on 24 February 1945 during Operation Grenade. The attack beyond Linnich was able to exploit a gap between the 12.SS-Korps and the 81.Korps on the road to Muenchen-Gladbach. (NARA)



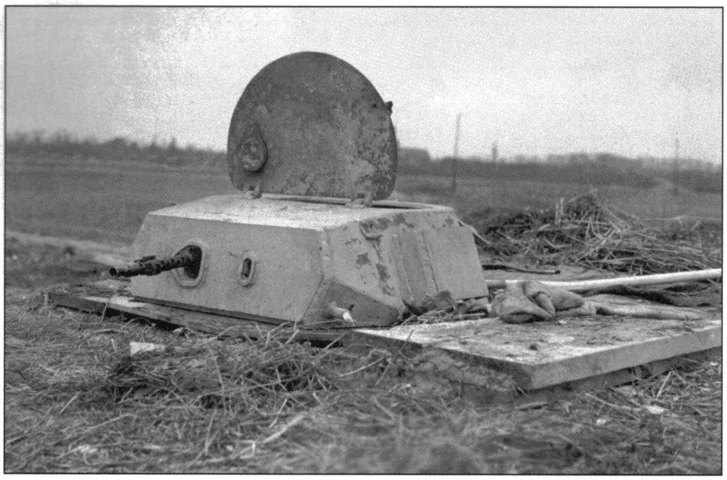
These are two of the rarest Shermans in US service in 1945, two of the four M4 Crocodile flamethrower tanks of the 739th Tank Battalion. These consisted of M4 tanks modified with a small flamethrower turret on the right front of the hull, towing the flame fuel in an armored trailer derived from the Churchill Crocodile. Although the US Army had planned to acquire a hundred of these, the program was cancelled and only four were deployed in 1945. They were first used to attack the citadel in Julich during Operation Grenade on 24 February 1945 and are seen outside the town that day. (NARA)



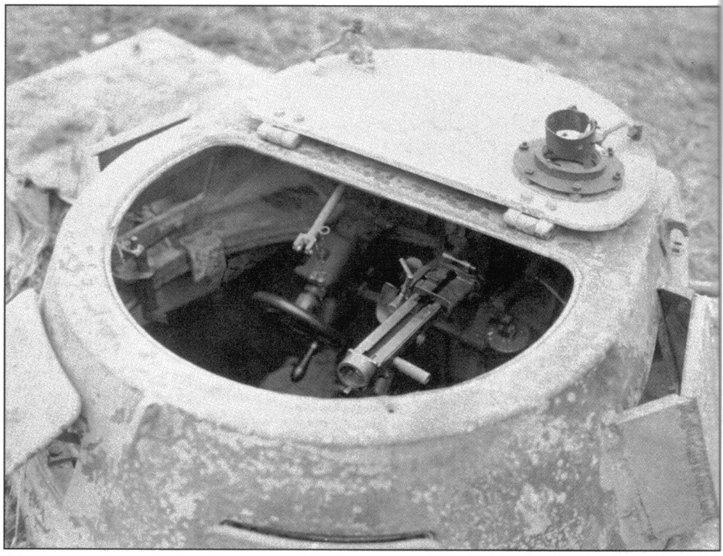
GIs from the 415th Infantry, 104th Division walk past a pair of disabled M4A3 tanks in Arnoldsweiler on 25 February 1945. Careful inspection of the glacis plate of the two tanks shows that they have been fitted with poured concrete armor as protection against panzerfausts. (NARA)



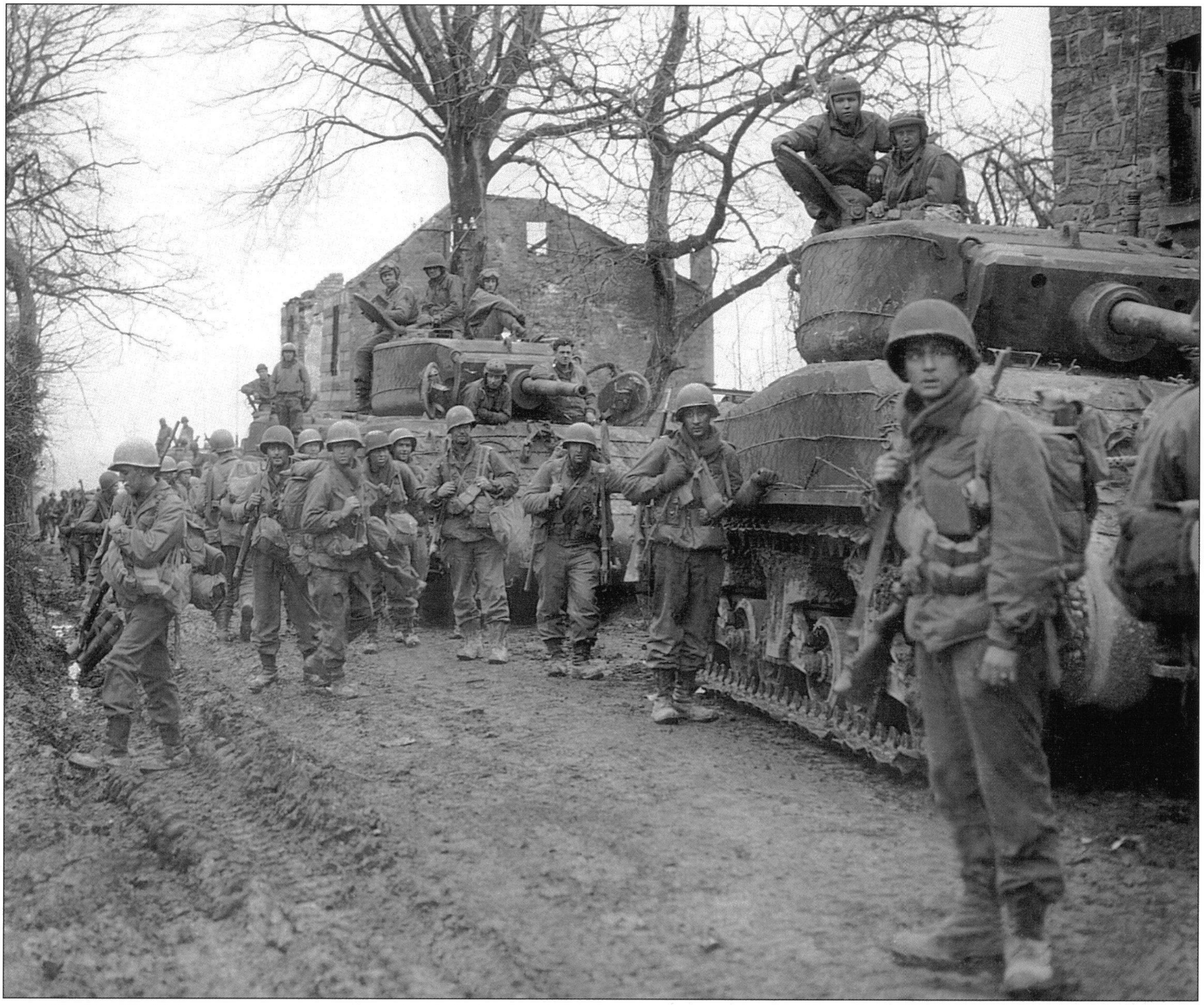
A pair of M4 from Combat Command B, 2nd Armored Division cross a treadway bridge into the battered town of Julich on 26 February following several days of fighting. Julich was one of the key crossing points on the Roer river, and was nearly leveled in the fighting. (NARA)



"Waste not, want not" as the old saying goes. In this case, the Wehrmacht took old Pz.Kpfw.I turrets, modified them with a new thicker turret front and armor plate over their vulnerable side ports, and then deployed them as *panzerstellung* in the border defenses of the Siegfried line. This particular example was captured by the 30th Infantry Division during the fighting near Niederzier on 26 February 1945. (USMA)

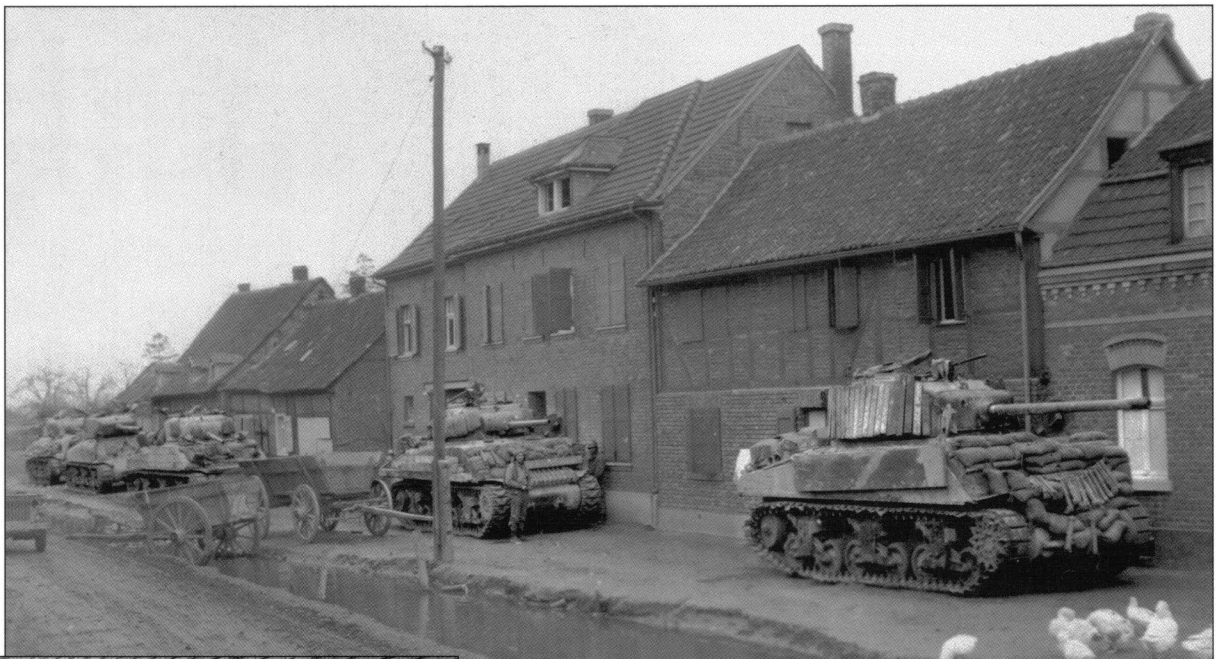


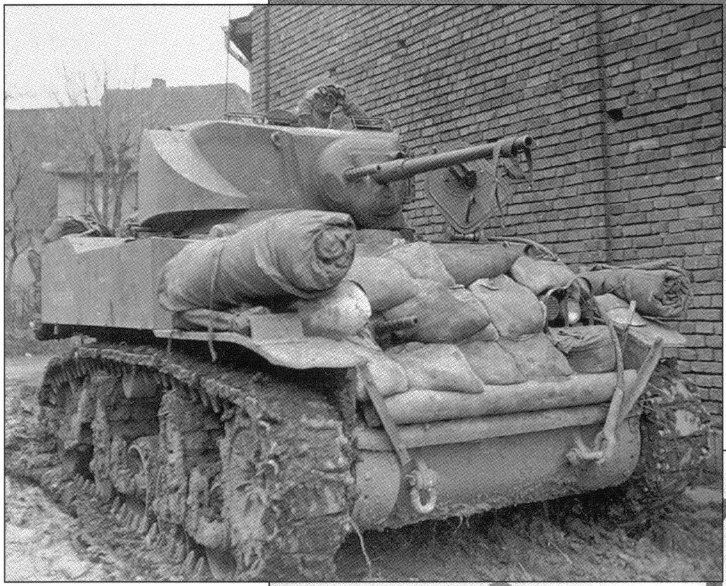
Another view of the *panzerstellung* from above showing the interior of the turret and the changes to the side including the addition of armored covers over the old openings. (USMA)



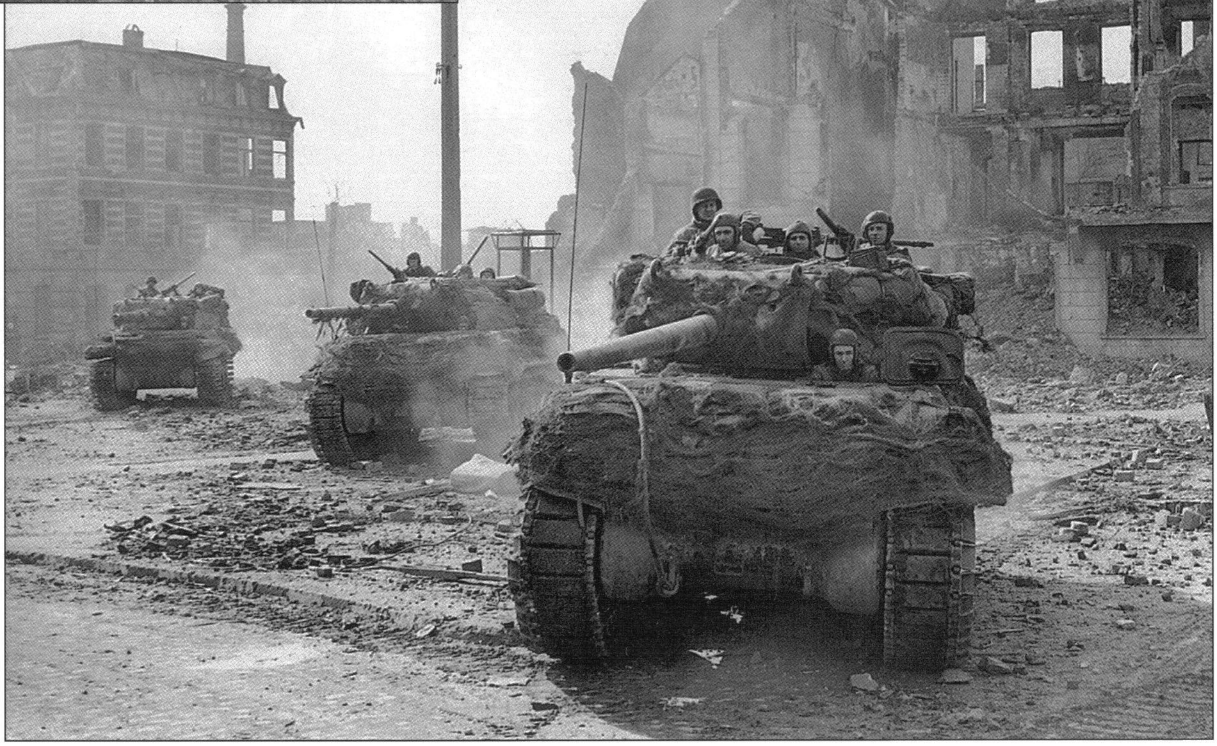
GIs of the 9th Division prepare to move forward near Bath on 27 February 1945 while being supported by a pair of M4A3E2 assault tanks of the 746th Tank Battalion. That day, the division finally captured one of the Roer dams at Schwammenauel, little solace for the heavy casualties the division had suffered in the bloody Huertgen fighting. (NARA)

A column of tanks of Co. C, 740th Tank Battalion rest alongside a row of buildings in Bergerhausen on 28 February 1945 during Operation Grenade. The lead tank, a M4A3 (76mm) commanded by Lt. Charlie Loopey of the 3rd Platoon has a curious collection of iron scrap on the hull side and turret, which was a local effort for added protection against panzerfaust. (NARA)

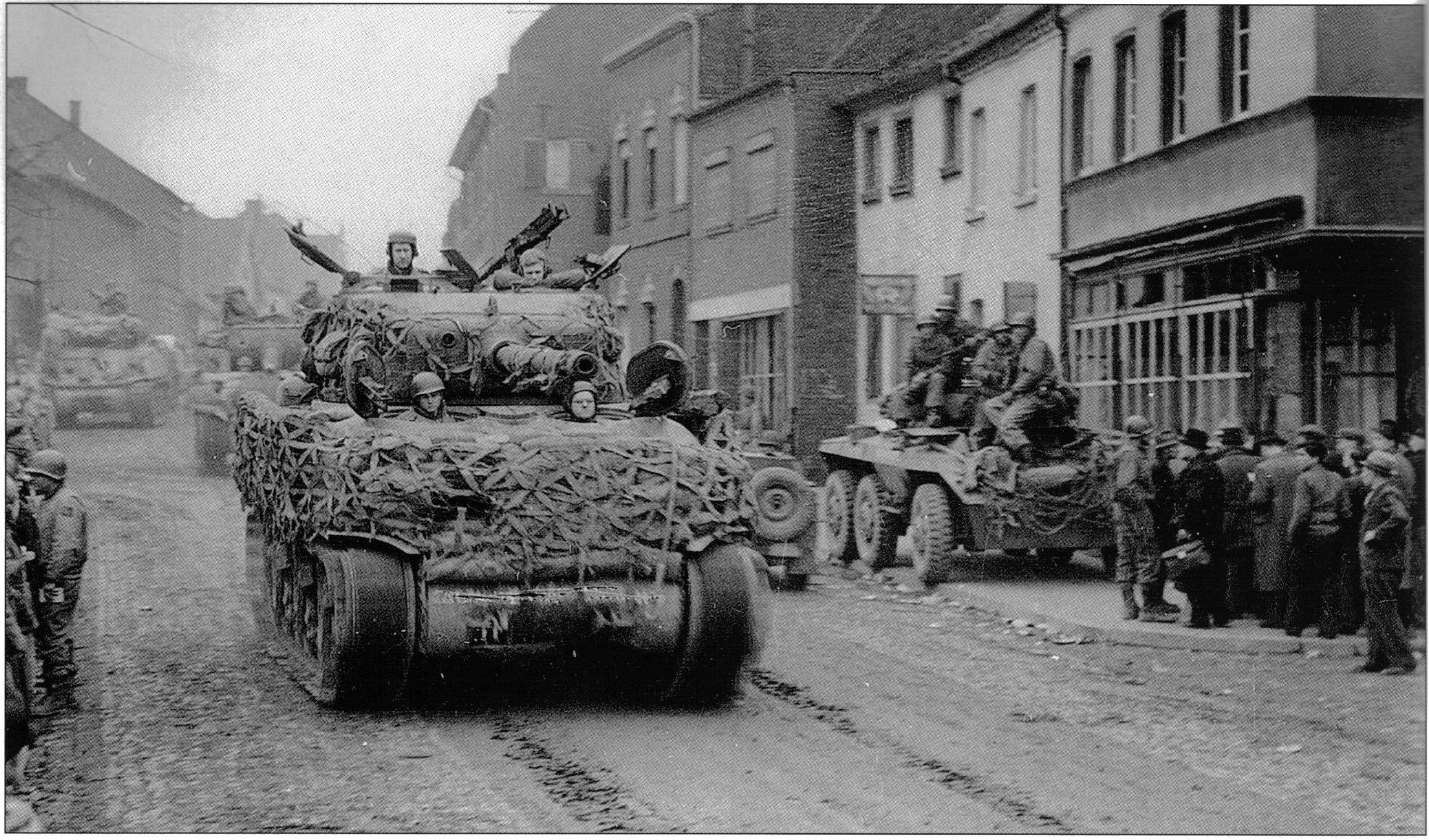




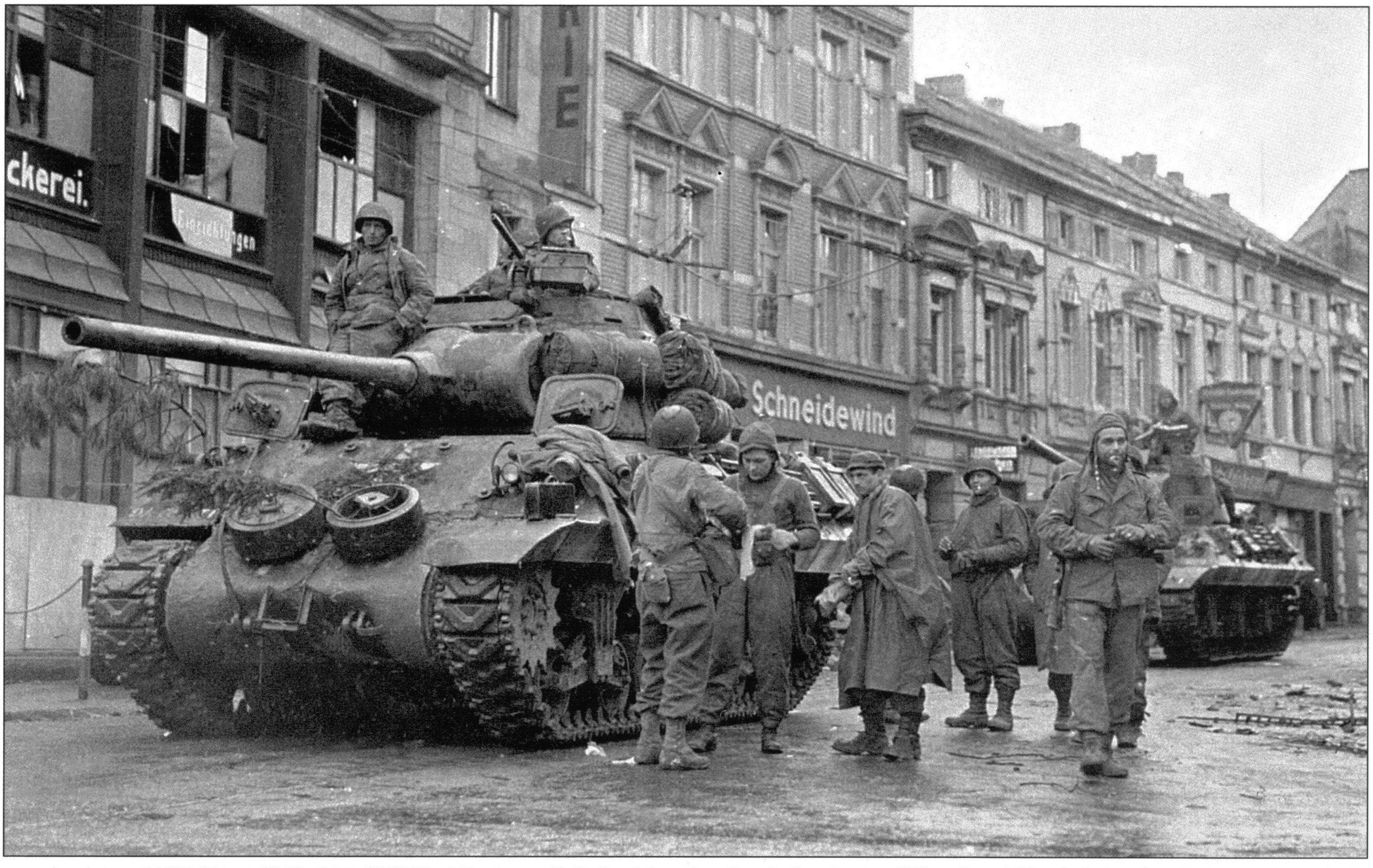
The commander of a M5A1 light tank of the 66th Armored Regiment, 2nd Armored Division during the fighting near Priestrath on 28 February 1945 prior to the attack across the Cologne plain towards the Nord Canal the following day. The tank is fitted with the usual sand-bag armor on the hull front and is from the late production batch with the cover over the folding pintle mount for the .30 cal machine gun on the turret side. (USMA)



Three M10 tank destroyers advance through Muenchen-Gladbach on 1 March 1945 when the town was captured by the 29th Division during Operation Grenade, the assault over the Roer river. (NARA)

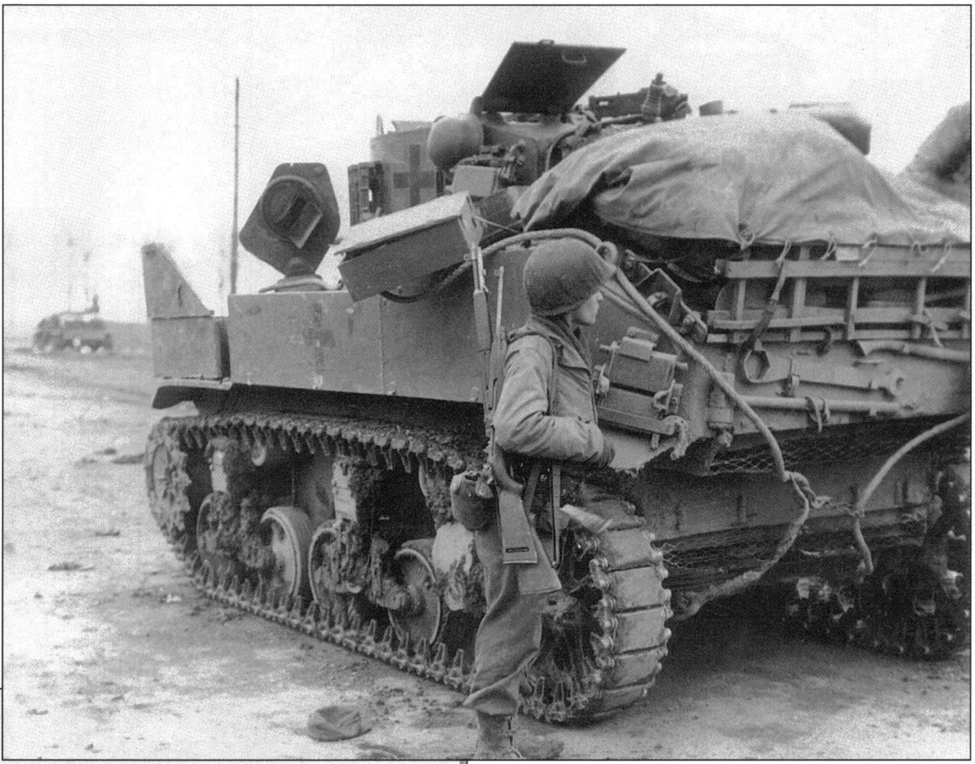


A M4A1 (76mm) of the 2nd Armored Division passes through Muechen-Gladbach on 1 March 1945 as the Roer offensive finally succeeds. This is probably one of the M4A1 tanks first used in Operation Cobra in July 1944, and it has been retrofitted with the usual Ninth Army appliqué consisting of steel tank tracks, a layer of sandbags and a covering of artillery camouflage netting over the glacis plate for added protection against *panzerfausts*. (NARA)

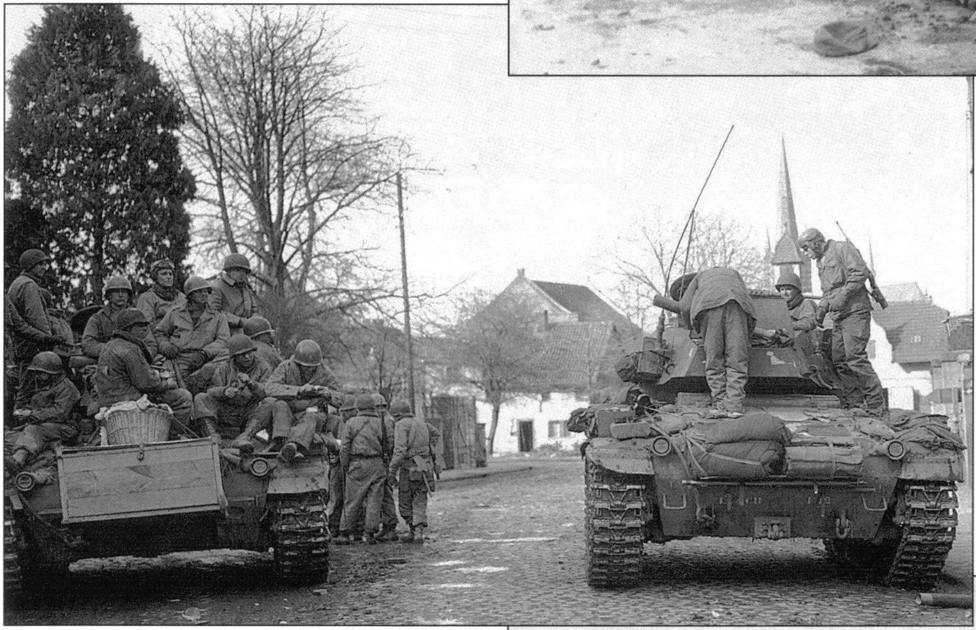


A column of M36 90mm GMC of the 628th Tank Destroyer Battalion take a breather in the streets of Rheydt on 1 March during the 5th Armored Division's fight to cross the Niers Canal. The lead vehicle is fitted with an armored parapet around the open turret, a frequent local improvisation in the final months of the war to protect this vulnerable area from snipers. (USMA)

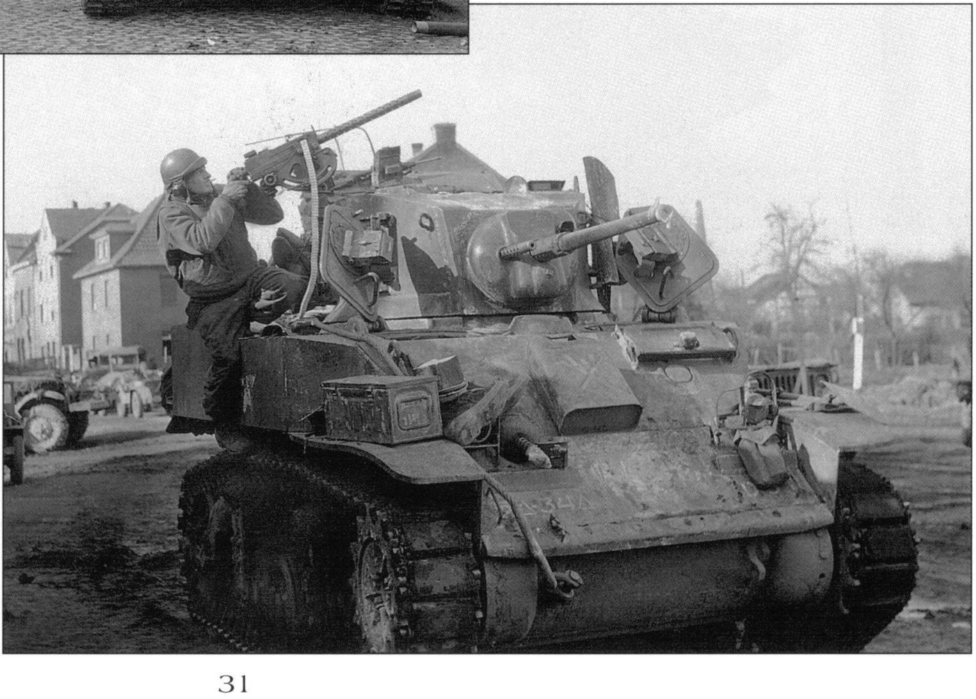
To the Rhine



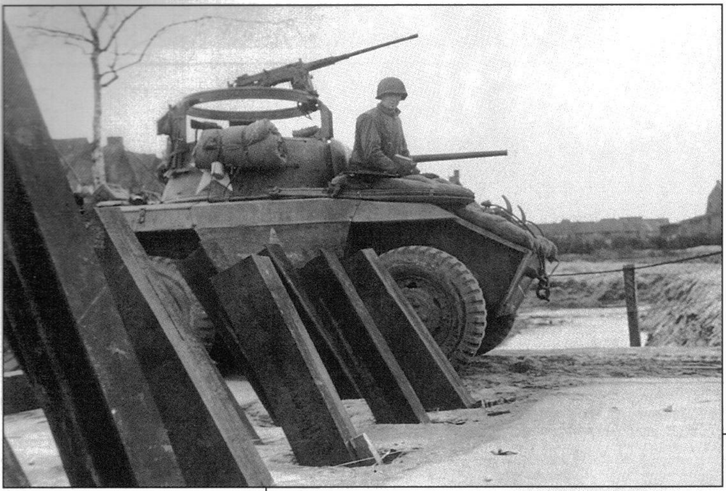
On 1 March, the 83rd Division prepared a small task force consisting of the 330th Infantry with tank support from the 736th Tank Battalion to seize a bridge over the Rhine at Oberkassel near Dusseldorf. The lead element of the task force consisted of German speaking GIs, and a few tanks painted in German markings. This is one of those tanks, a M5A1 light tank, photographed near Rheindahlen in late February 1945. In the event, the ruse failed, and the Germans destroyed the bridge. (NARA)



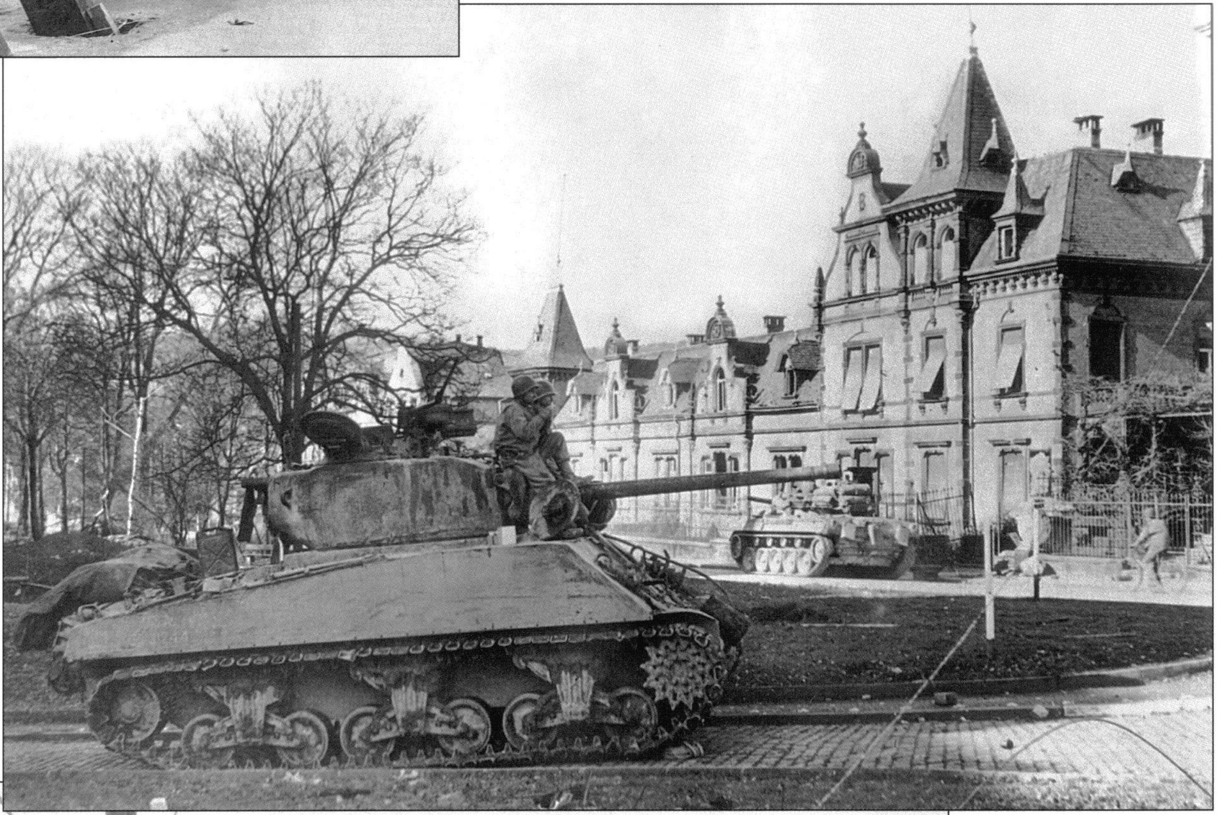
A pair of M24 light tanks of the 4th Cavalry Group prepare for a mission near Bedburg on 2 March 1945. The rifleman on the tank to the left are probably from an attached infantry unit as the cavalry squadrons were usually armed with M1 carbines rather than M1 rifles. (NARA)



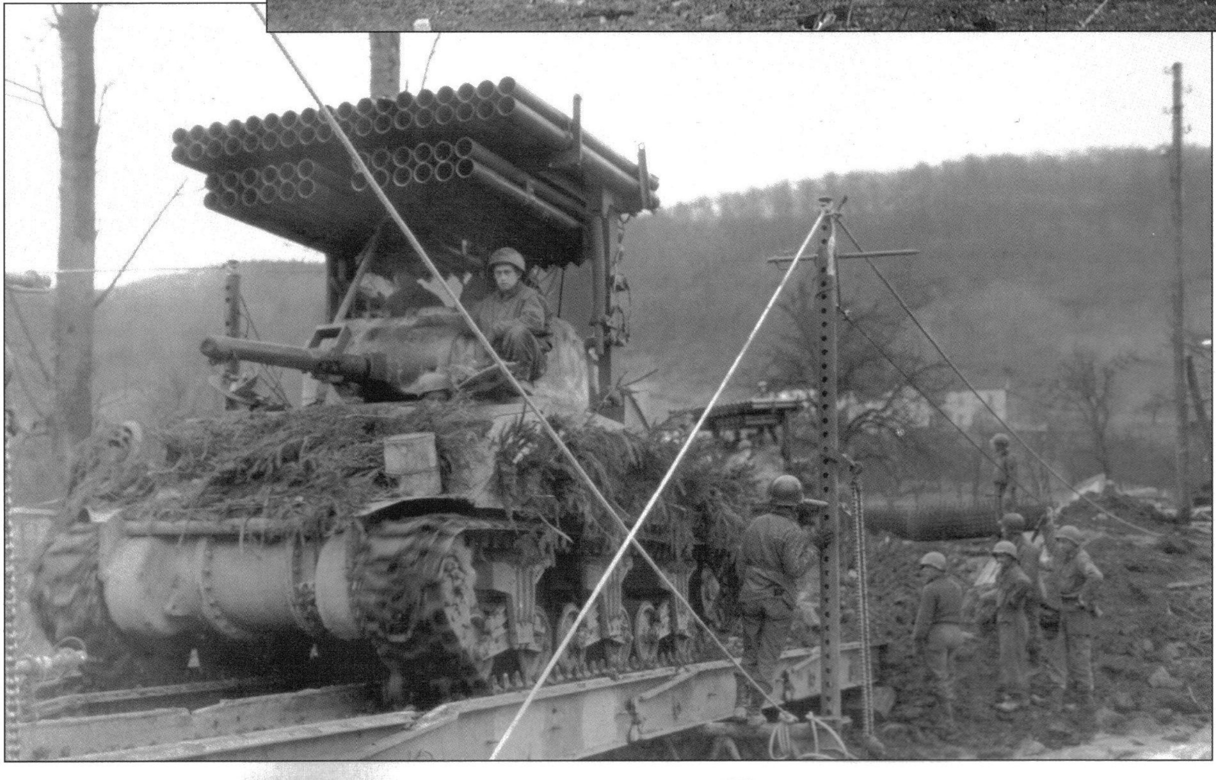
The commander of a M5A1 of Co. D, 34th Tank Battalion, 5th Armored Division blazes away at an unseen target with the tank's .30 cal light machine in the town of Viersen on 2 March 1945. The town had been heavily damaged by air attacks preceding Operation Grenade. The commander is wearing a French armored crewman's helmet, a prized find for many US tanker's as unlike the usual US "football" tanker's helmet, the French steel helmet offered ballistic protection. (NARA)



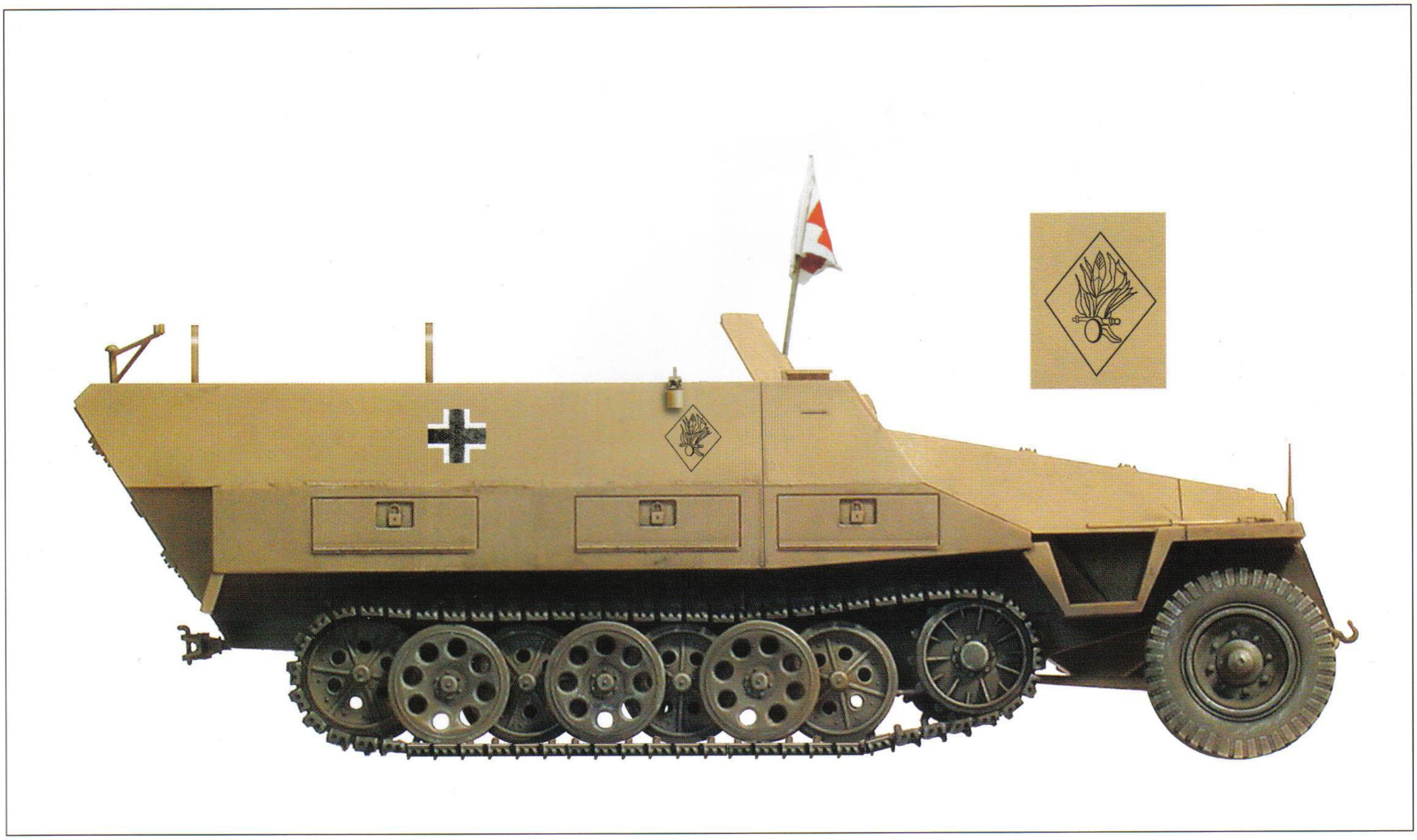
A M8 light armored car of a cavalry recon squadron of the 9th Army moves through a row of anti-tank obstacles near Venlo, the Netherlands on 2 March 1945. It is fitted with the usual field-improvised ring mount for a .50 cal machine gun over the turret. (NARA)



A M4A3 (76mm) of 10th Armored Division moves into Trier on 2 March 1945, the Moselle river city having fallen to Patton's Third Army the night before. The capture of Trier was a key step in Patton's drive into the Saar and across the Rhine later in the month.

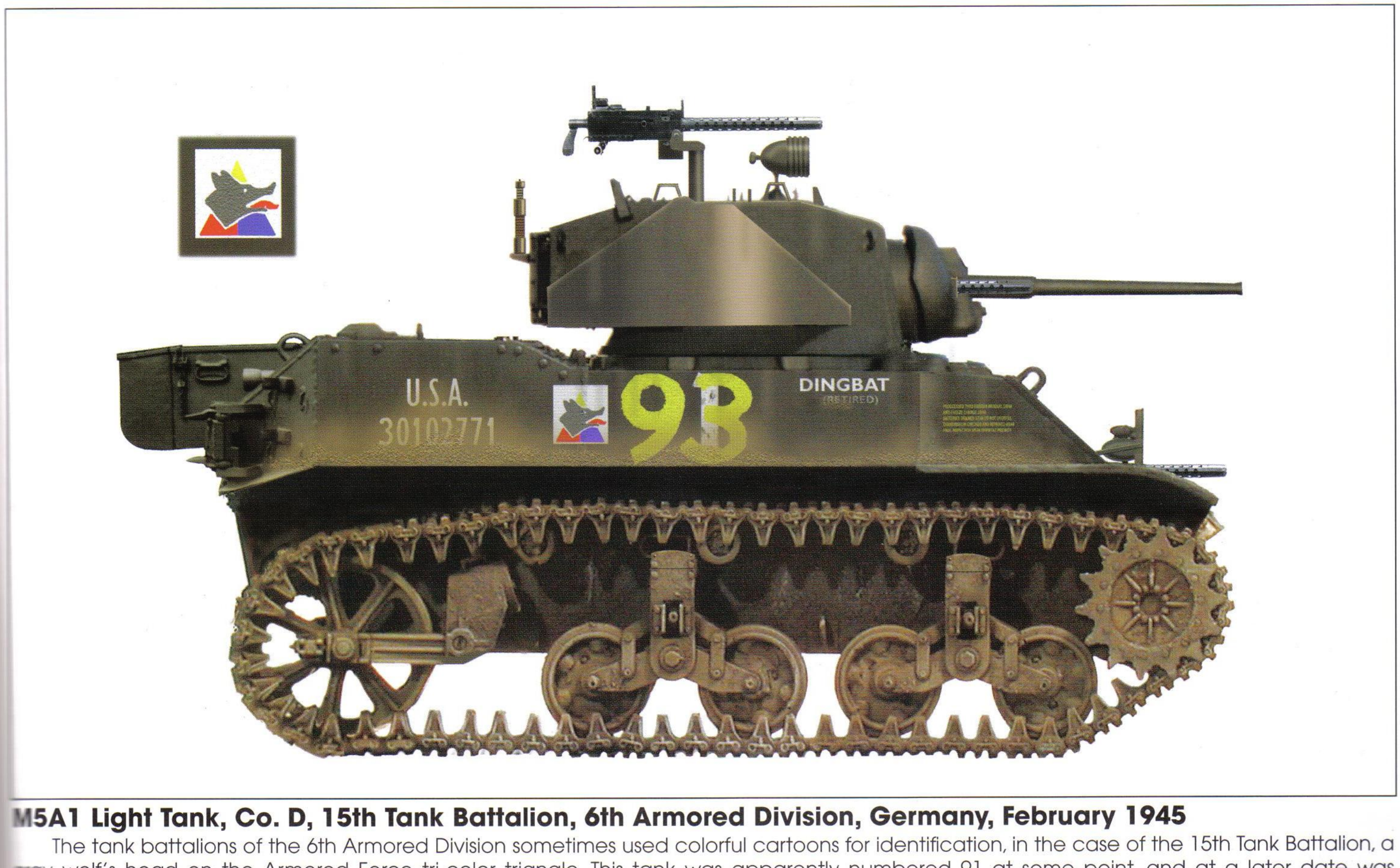


A M4 Calliope of the 702nd Tank Battalion crosses a treadway bridge near Alsdorf, Germany on 2 March 1945. These rocket launchers were not popular in tank units which felt that such weapons were better suited to artillery units. (NARA)



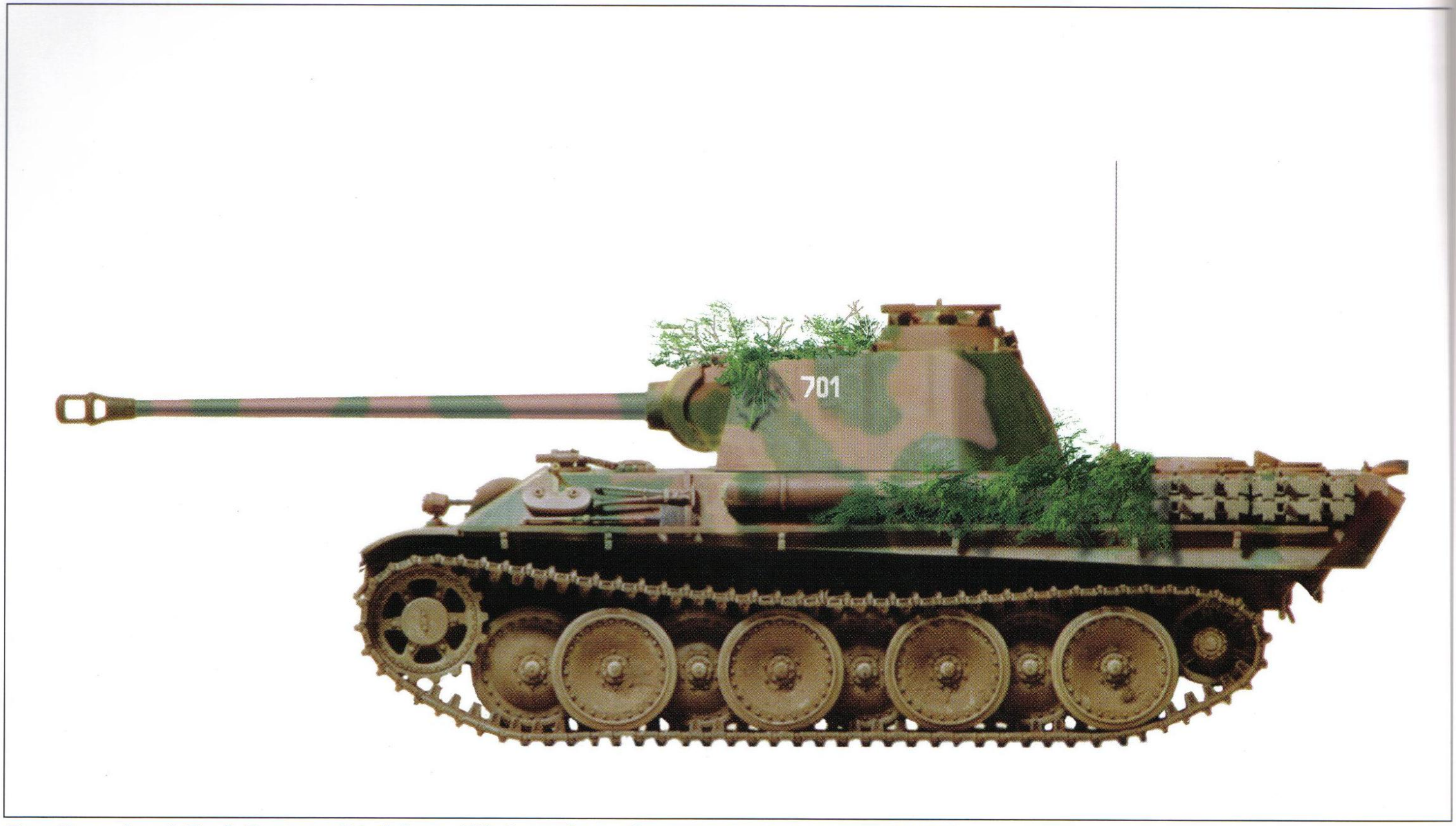
Sd.Kfz.251 Ausf.D Ambulance, 3.Panzer-Grenadier-Division, Aachen, October 1944

This Sd.Kfz.251 Ausf.D was used as an improvised ambulance by the 3.Panzer-Grenadier-Division following the surrender of the Aachen garrison in late October 1944. It carries a fairly intricate insignia on the hull side which is shown in detail on the inset drawing. It is finished plainly in overall RAL 7028 dark yellow, and a Red Cross flag has been lodged in the front machine gun shield.



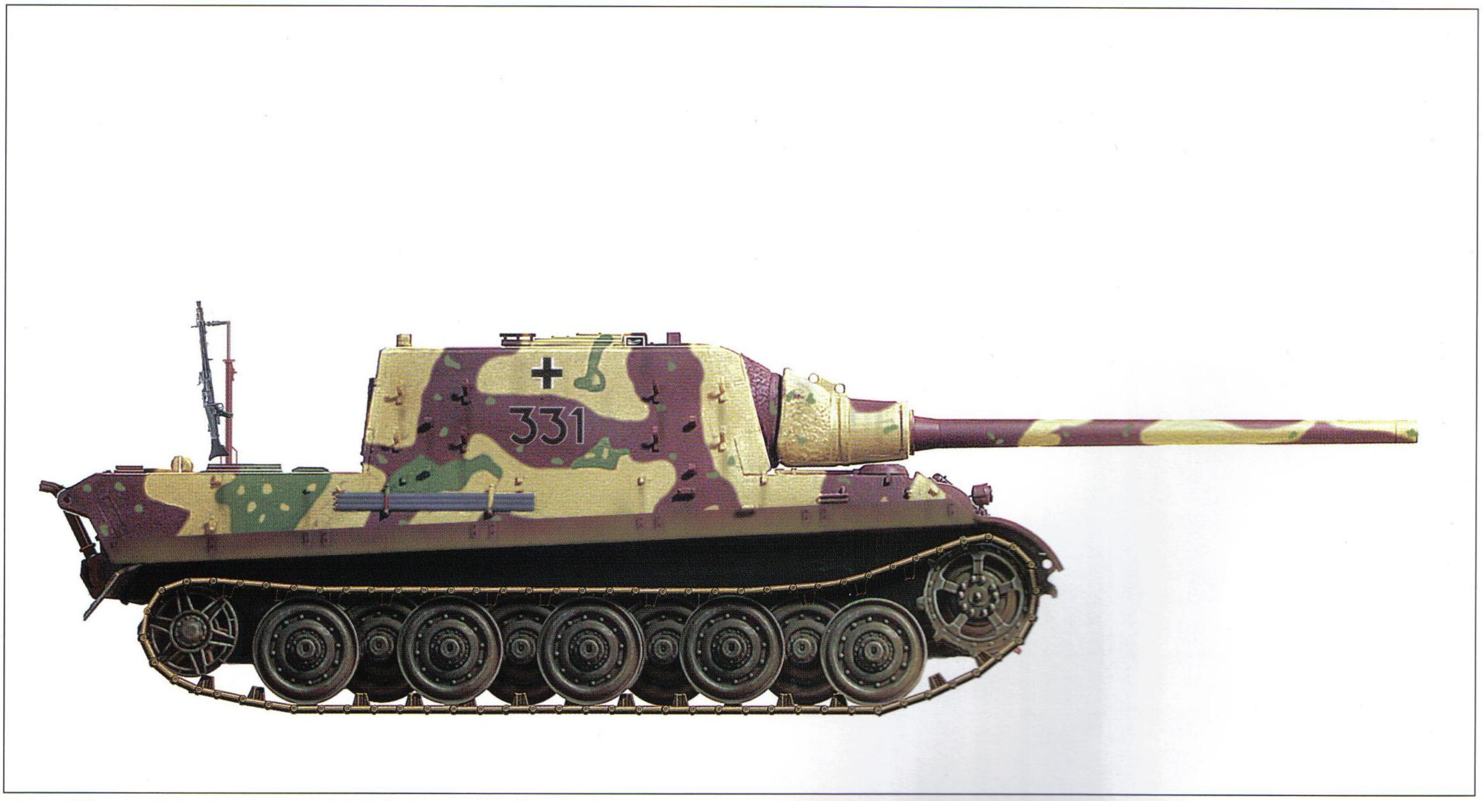
M5A1 Light Tank, Co. D, 15th Tank Battalion, 6th Armored Division, Germany, February 1945

The tank battalions of the 6th Armored Division sometimes used colorful cartoons for identification, in the case of the 15th Tank Battalion, a gray wolf's head on the Armored Force tri-color triangle. This tank was apparently numbered 91 at some point, and at a later date was renumbered 93 with the first number being overpainted. There is some evidence of the old number still visible. It is finished in the usual lusterless olive drab.



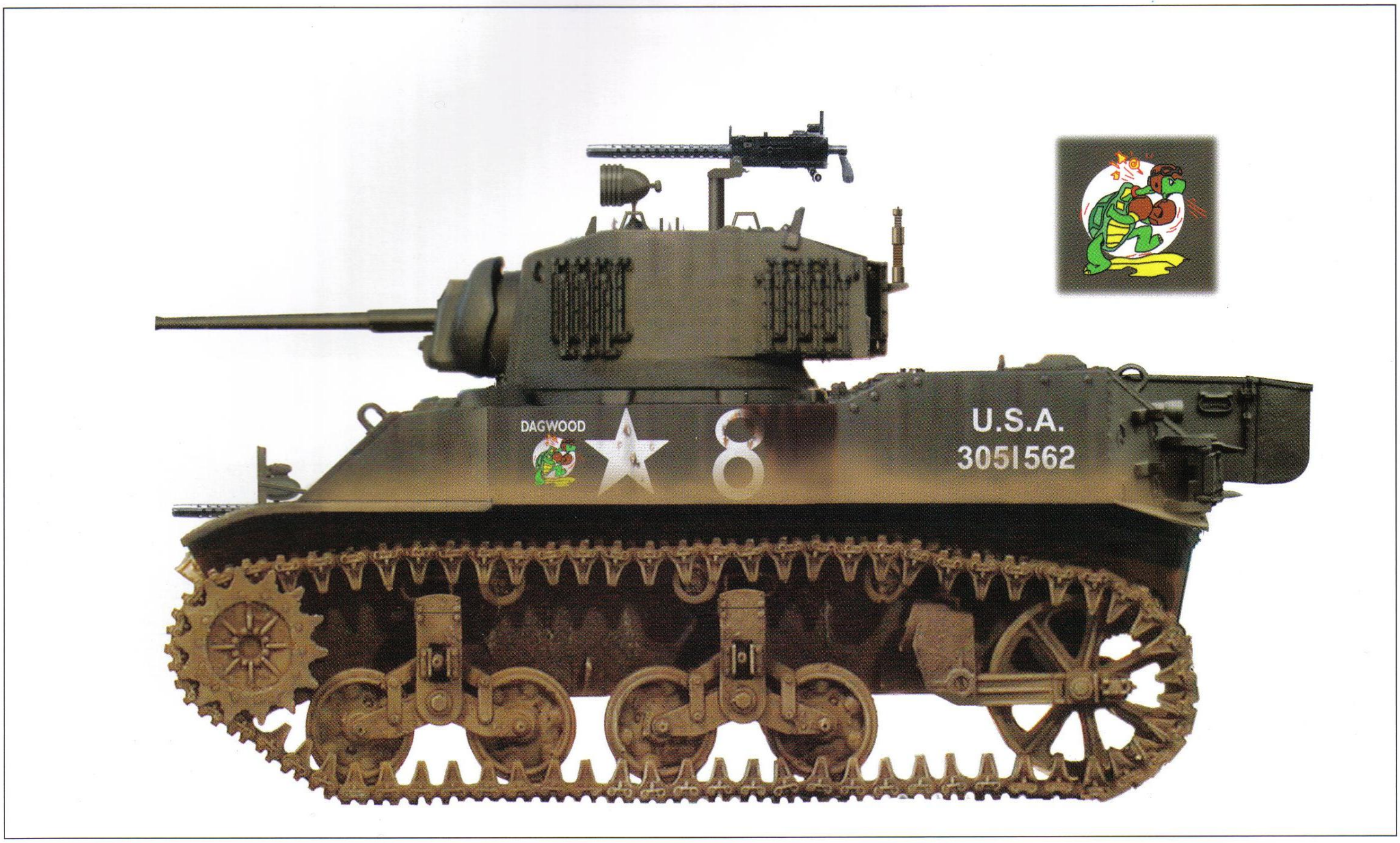
Panther Ausf.G, 2.Panzer-Division, Eifel region, Germany, February 1945

This Panther Ausf.G is finished in the plain scheme seen on some German armored vehicles from mid-September to mid-December when the previous practice of painting the vehicles in overall RAL 7028 dark yellow was stopped due to paint shortages. Instead, the vehicles were left in the normal red lead primer color, and patches of camouflage colors applied over it, in this case, large blotches of RAL 6003 olive green. The tactical numbers are small, but not untypical during this period of the war.



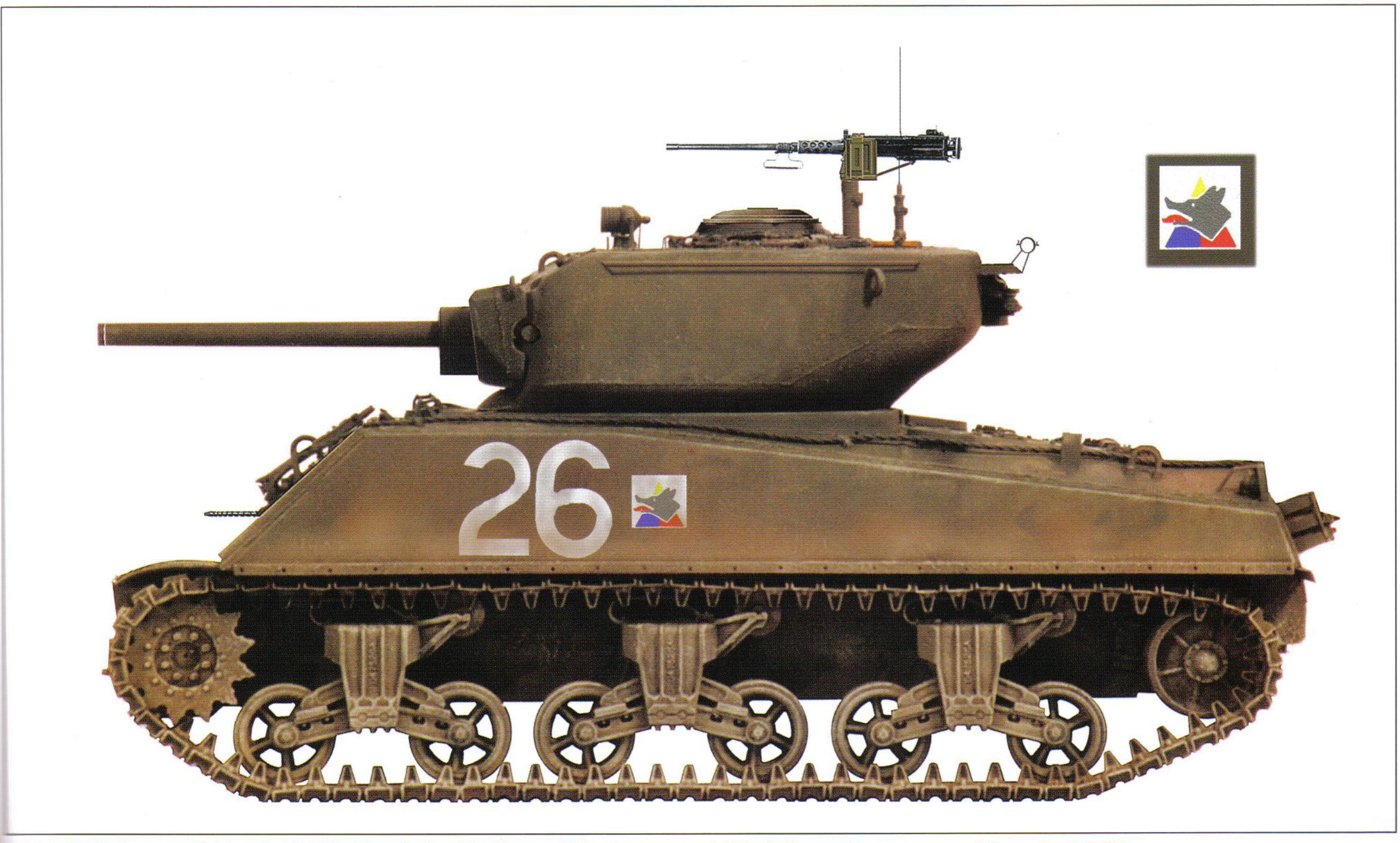
Jagdtiger, 3/s.Pz.Jg.Abt.653, Neustadt, Germany, March 1945

This Jagdtiger was commanded by Lt. Casper Geoggerle and after its gun was disabled in a firefight with the 10th Armored Division, it was abandoned by its crew in the town of Neustadt an der Weinstrasse. It was later recovered by the US Army and is currently on display at Aberdeen Proving Grounds. This particular vehicle was completed in late November 1944, and so was finished in the post September factory scheme consisting of a base coat of red lead primer, with sprayed patches of RAL 7028 dark yellow smaller patches of RAL 6003 olive green. There is a slight hint of the August style "hinterhalt" ambush scheme, with small blobs of dark yellow and dark green randomly applied. The armored side skirts were removed at some point, exposing a long strip of red lead primer color along the lower edge of the hull side.



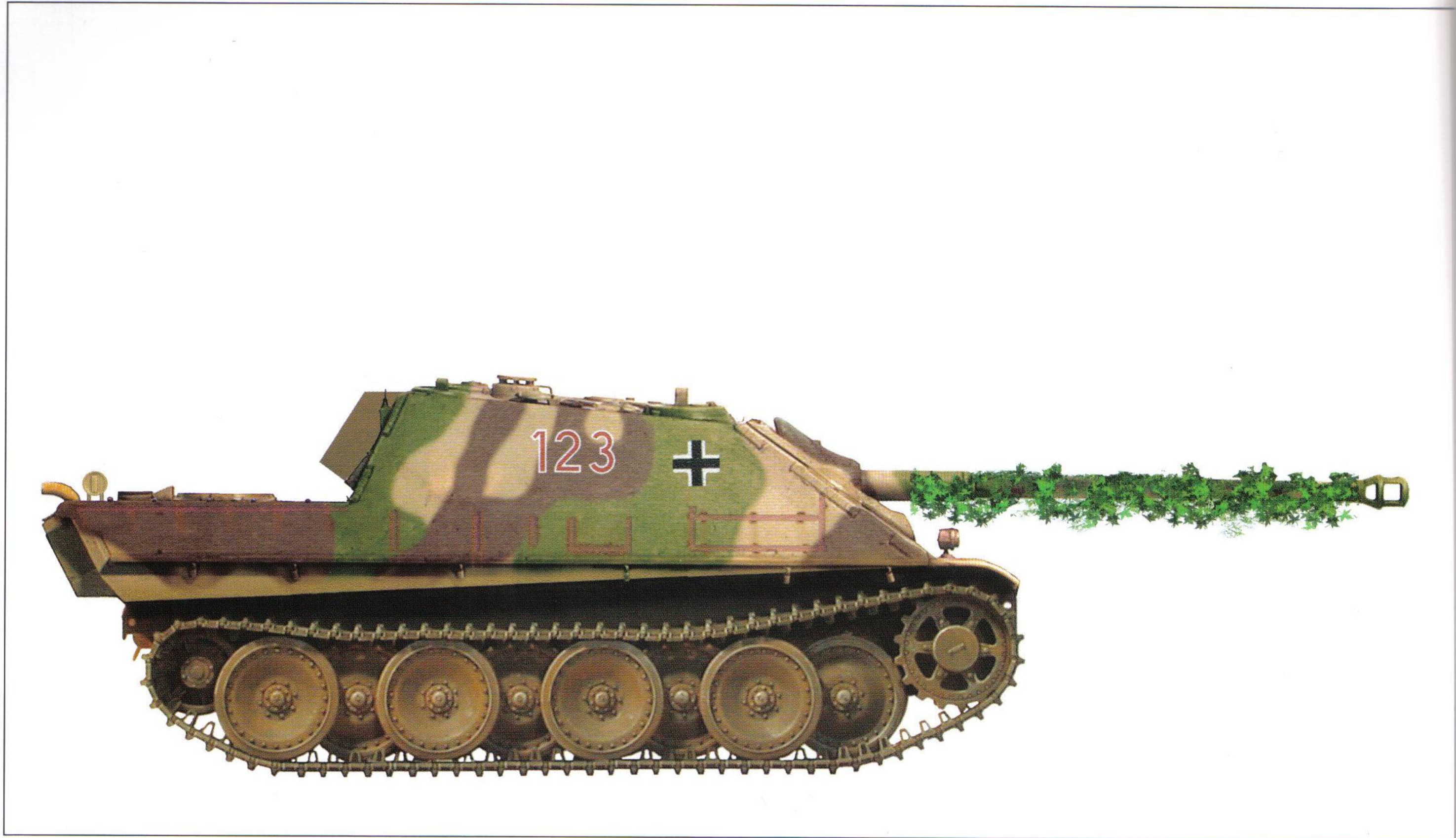
M5A1 Light Tank, Co. D, 68th Tank Battalion, Frankfurt, Germany, March 1945

This is another example of the cartoons carried by tanks of the 6th Armored Division, in this case, the boxing turtle of the 68th Tank Battalion. This particular cartoon was designed by an animator from the famous Disney studios. This tank probably had a two-digit "speed-number" on the hull side, but the second digit is obscured by grease or dirt.



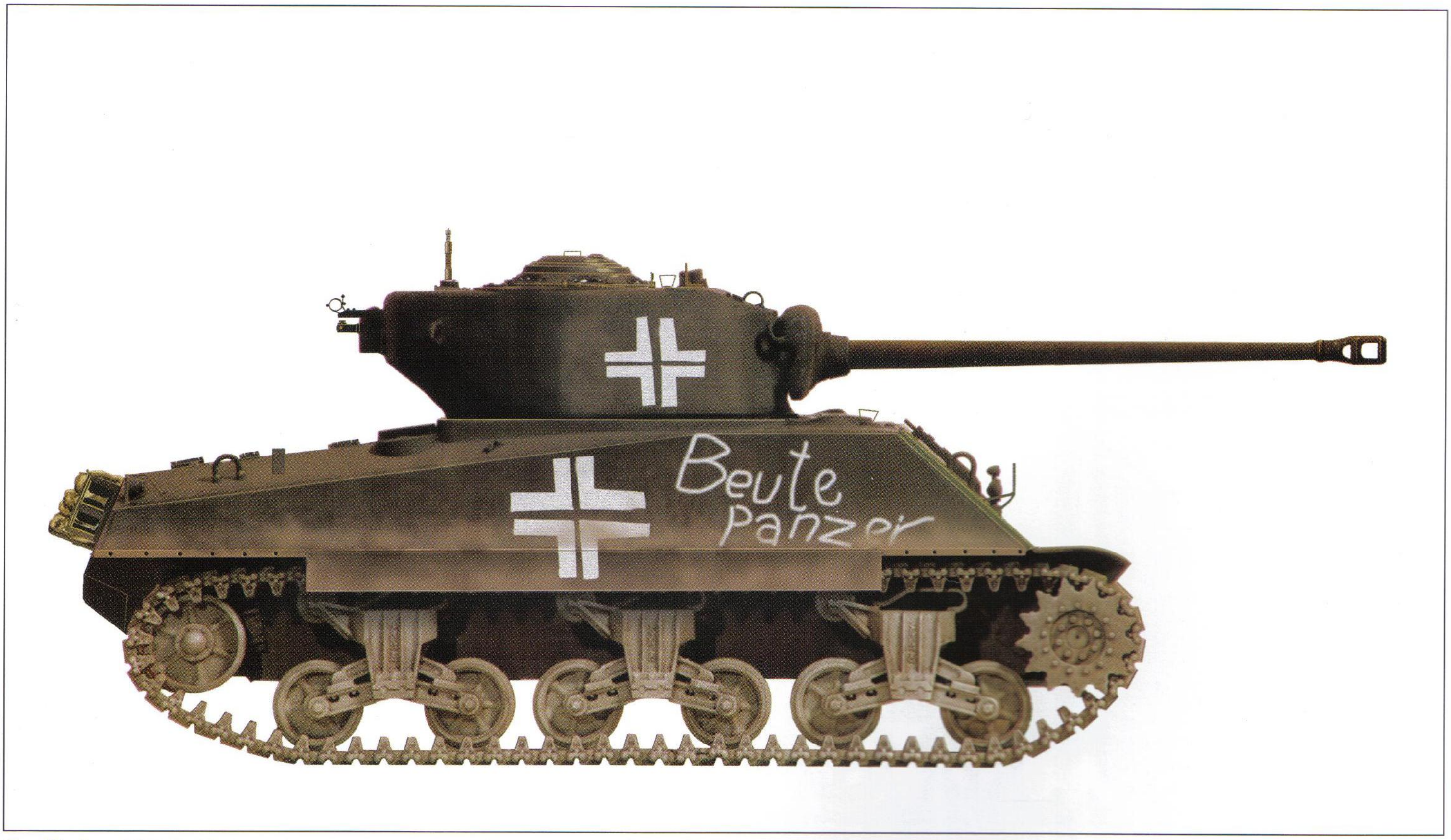
M4A3E2 Assault Tank, 15th Tank Battalion, 6th Armored Division, Germany, March 1945

The 6th Armored Division usually painted large "speed-numbers" on the hull side of their tanks in 1945. These were used for radio communication between the tanks. Behind this number is the gray wolf-head insignia of the 15th Tank Battalion.



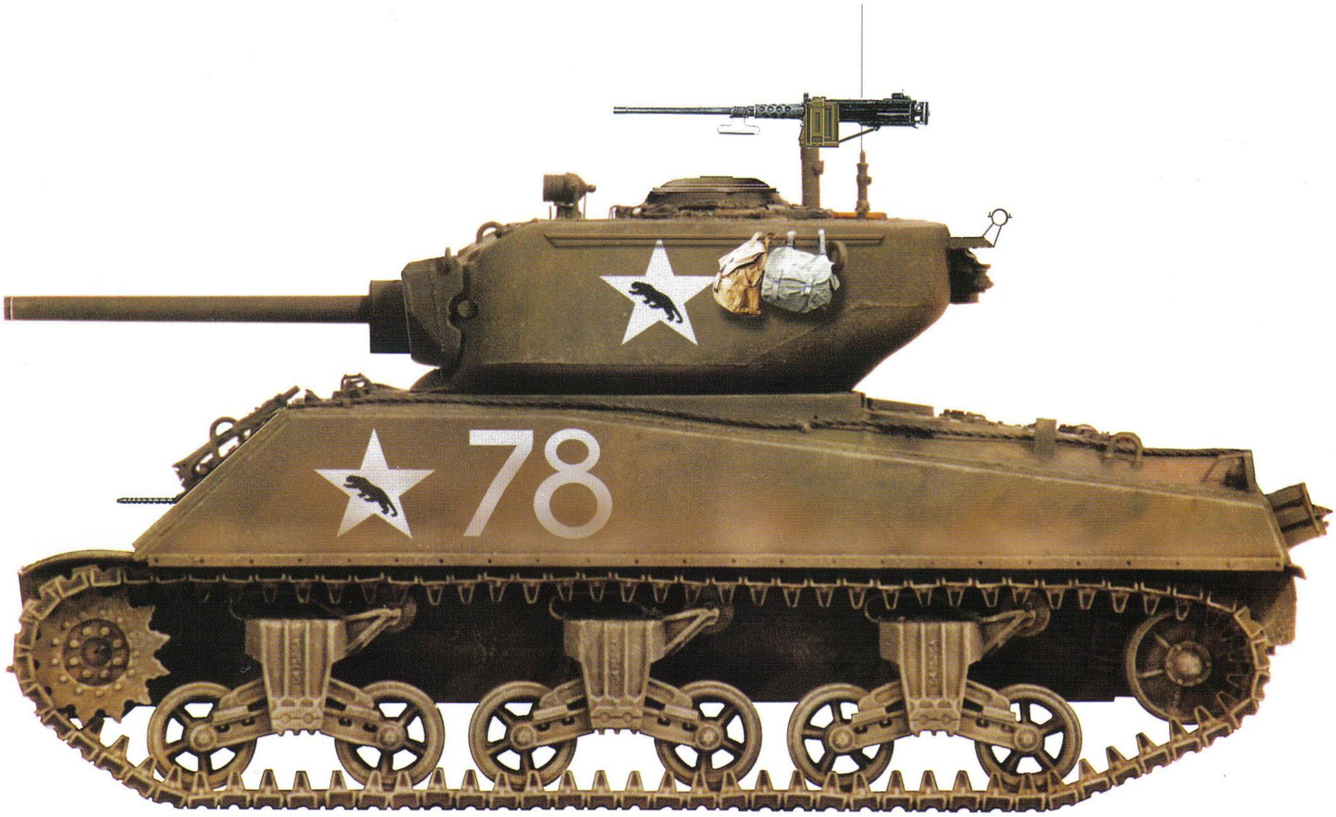
Jagdpanther, 1/s.Pz.Jg.Abt.654, Germany, March 1945

This Jagdpanther is in the typical post-September 1944 scheme of red lead primer with patches of RAL 7028 dark yellow and RAL 6003 olive green. This unit had the practice of removing the tool stowage from the sides of the vehicle and re-arranging them on the rear for more convenient access, a process that was undertaken when the unit was re-equipping at Grafenwohr in October 1944. As a result, the outlines of the tool racks can be seen silhouetted on the hull side where the red lead primer has been exposed.



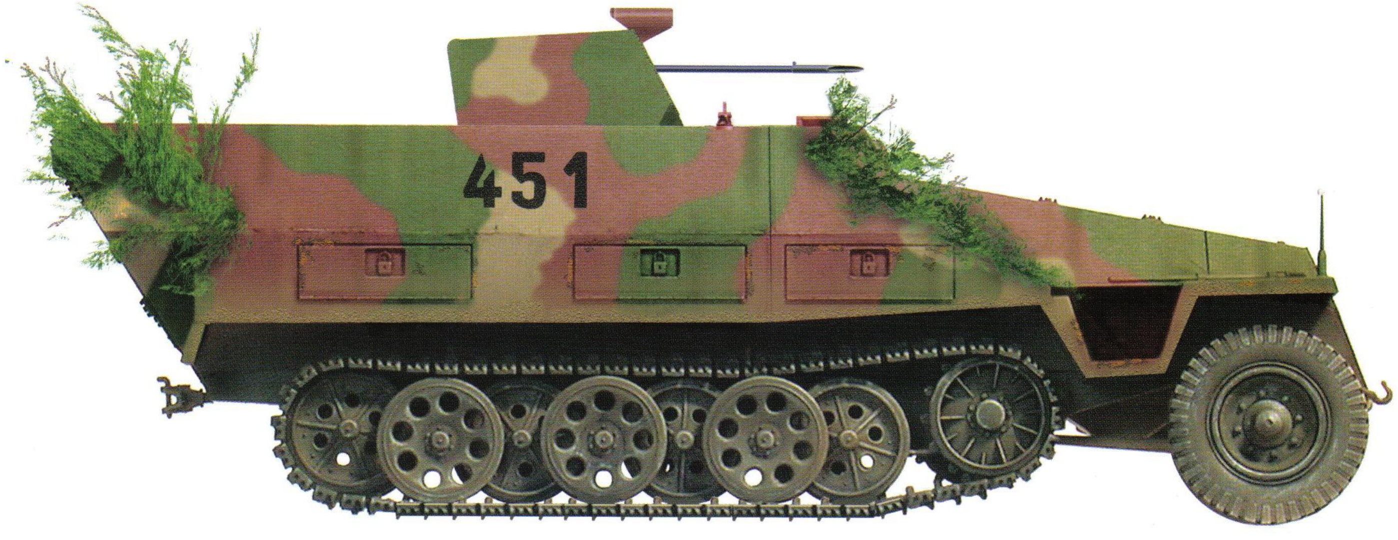
Pz.Kpfw. M4 748(a), Aschafenburg, Germany, March 1945

A German unit in Aschafenburg put a captured US M4A3 (76mm) to use during the fighting for the city in late March. It has been prominently marked with white crosses, as well as a very large inscription "Beute panzer" (captured tank), to avoid fratricide. The tank remains in its original US lusterless olive drab. It was later knocked out by a US M36 tank destroyer.



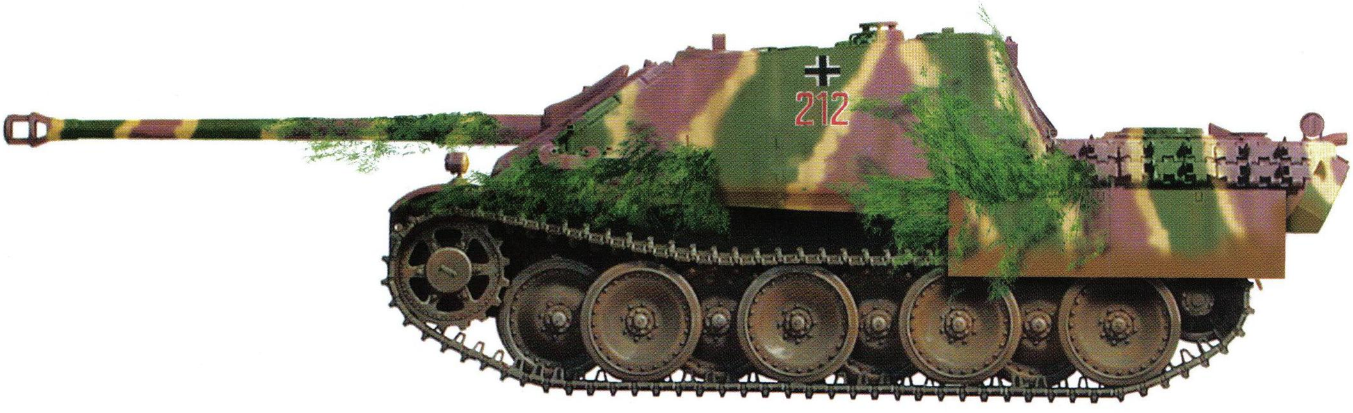
M4A3E2 Assault Tank, 69th Tank Battalion, 6th Armored Division, Germany, March 1945

Tankers of the 69th Tank Battalion sometimes painted a stalking black panther in the stars on their tanks during the spring of 1945 as seen here on this M4A3E2. The other markings are typical of the 6th Armored Division, including the large speed numbers on the hull side.



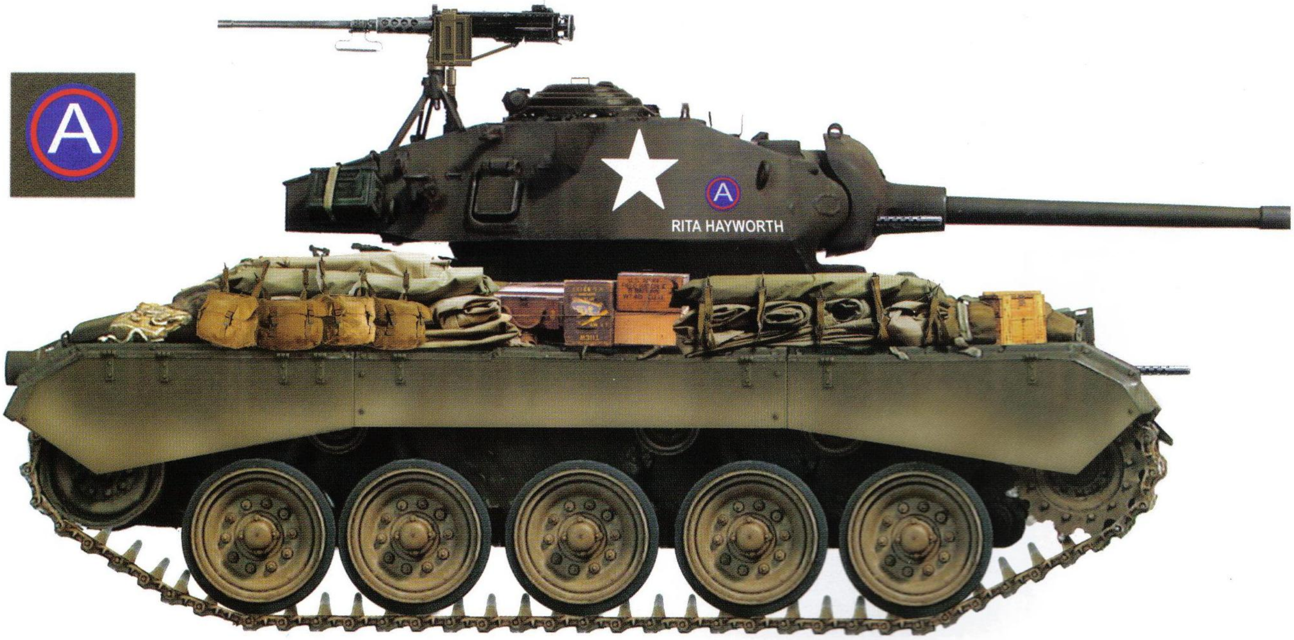
Sd.Kfz.251/21, Pz.Gren.Regt.60, 116.Panzer-Division, Germany, March 1945

This late production Sd.Kfz.251/21 is finished in the usual post-September 21944 scheme of red lead primer with patches of RAL 6003 olive green and RAL 7028 dark yellow. The vehicle tactical number is plain black without the usual white trim.



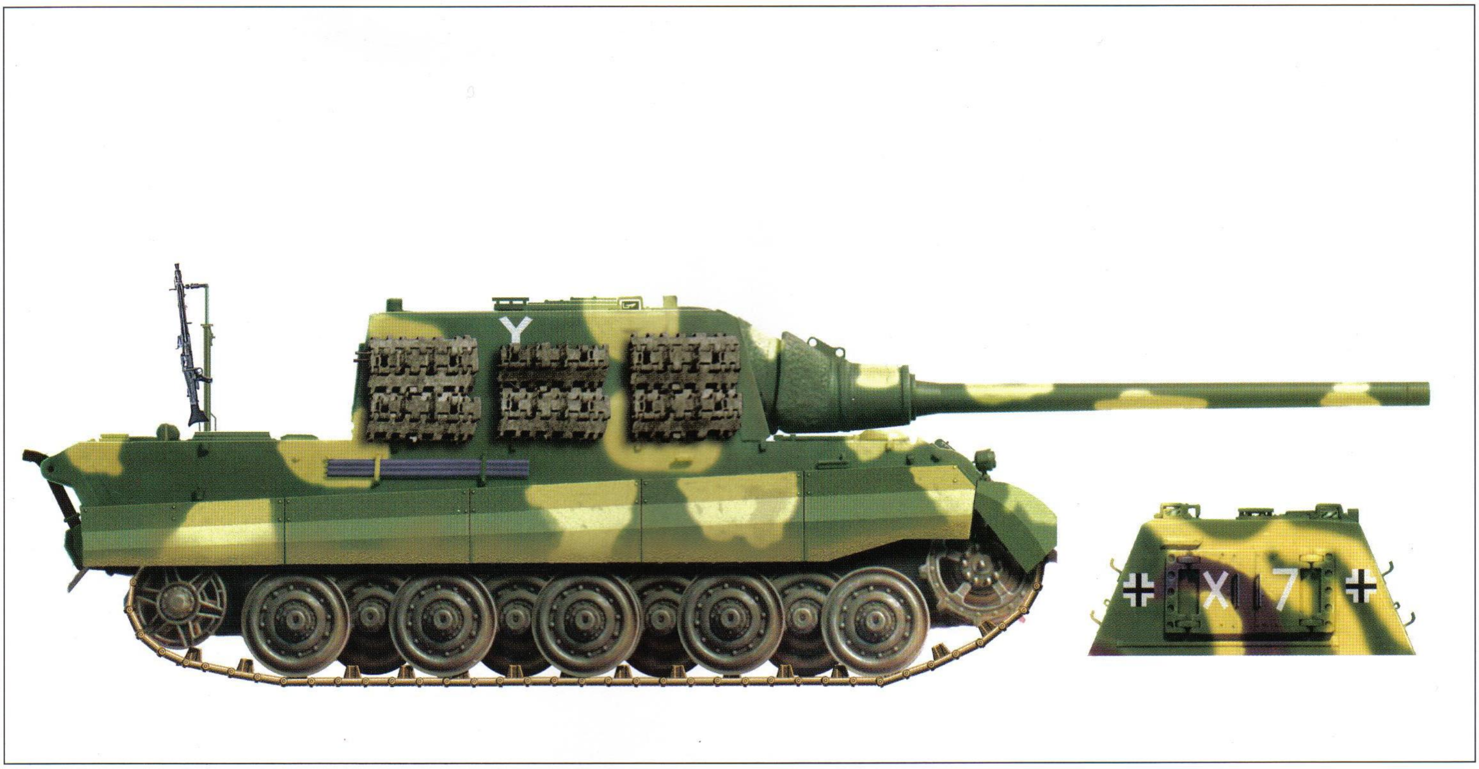
Jagdpanther, 2/s.Pz.Jg.Abt.654, Germany, March 1945

The 3rd Company of this unit painted their vehicles in a distinctive pattern of angled colored bands edged in dark yellow when refitting in October 1944, but this style seems to have been later copied by other companies as seen here. This Jagdpanther was probably a replacement, it is still fitted with the tool stowage rack on the hull side, a feature which was removed during refitting. This vehicle follows the post-September 1944 guidelines, being painted overall in basic red lead primer, with a pattern of RAL 6003 olive green trimmed in RAL 7028 dark yellow.



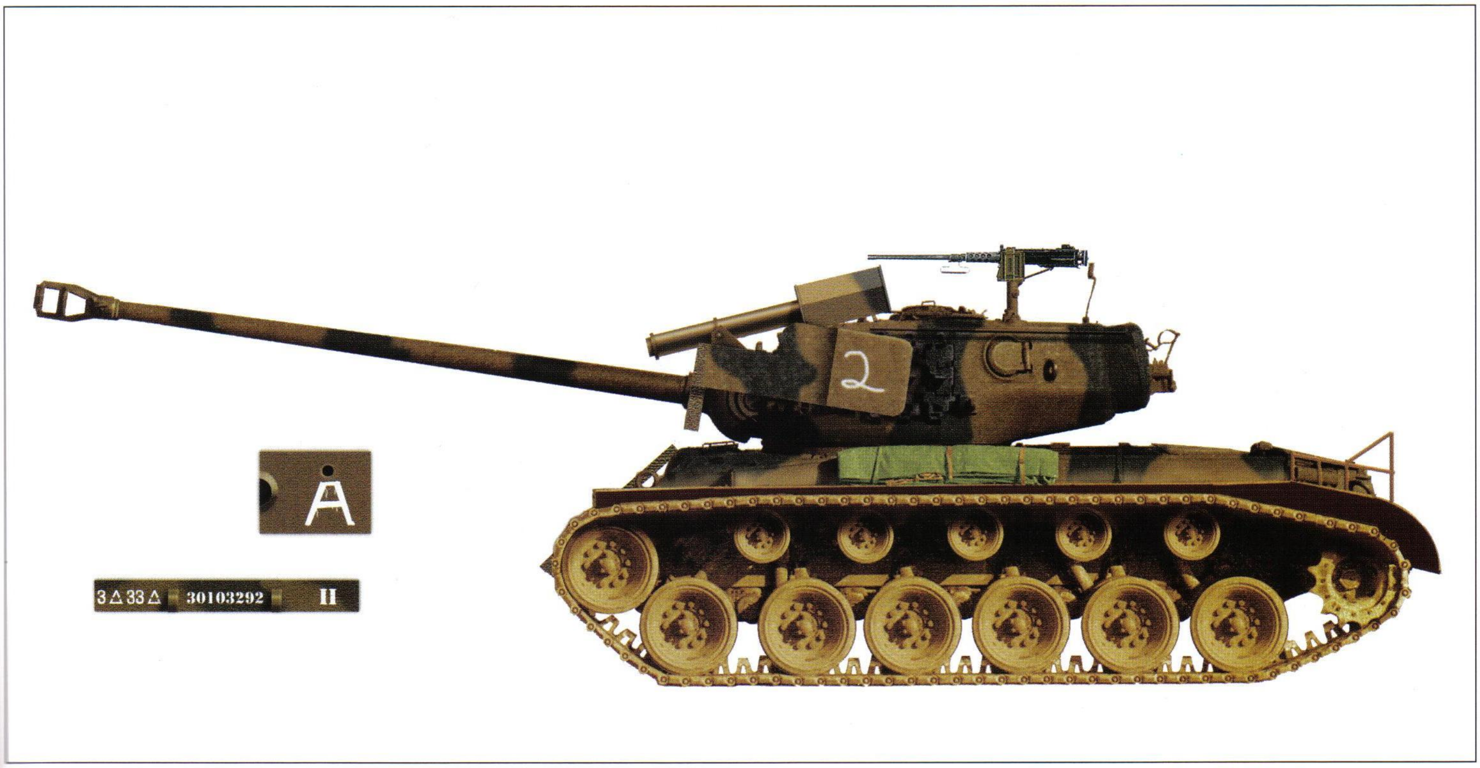
M24 Light tank, F Troop, 2nd Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, Bavaria, Germany, April 1945

This unit, which was attached to Patton's Third Army, painted the Third Army patch on their turret during the final weeks of the war, a blue disc with red trim and a white letter A. This tank is named after the famous movie star, Rita Hayworth, and is finished in the usual overall lusterless olive drab.



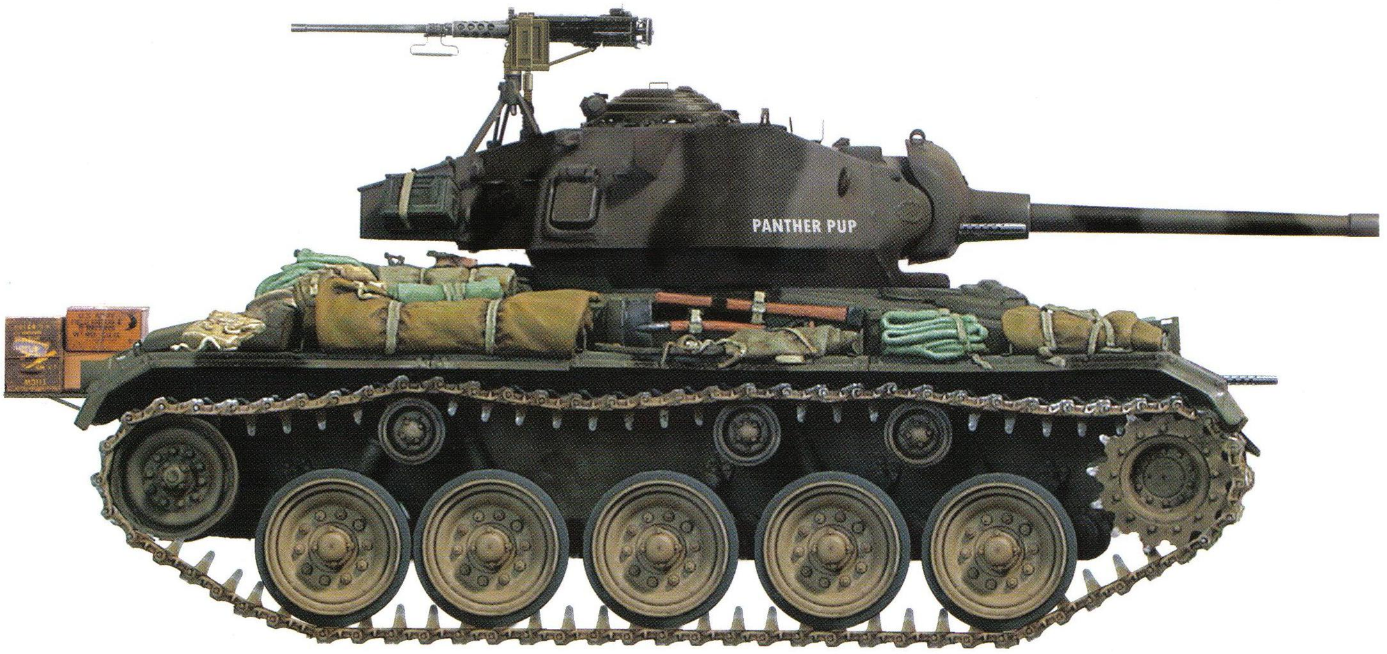
Jagdtiger, s.Pz.Jg.Abt.512 Germany, April 1945

This Jagdtiger was lost during the fighting around Paderborn with the 3rd Armored Division. This unit used an unusual tactical numbering system consisting of the letters X, Y, and Z for its three companies. The letters were painted on the upper hull sides, and repeated on the rear access doors. The inset drawing shows an example from another vehicle of 1/s.Pz.Jg.Abt.512 with the tactical number X23. This particular vehicle was a relatively late production example painted in the overall RAL 6003 olive green scheme adopted in mid-December 1944. This color was over-painted with whatever paint was available, in this case, with large blotches of RAL 7028 dark yellow. The other Jagdtiger, X23, also has blotches of RAL 8017 brown. It would appear that at some stage, this Jagdtiger swapped side skirts with another vehicle, as the pattern on the side skirts does not match the hull. Also, the outer panel of the front fender has not been properly attached.



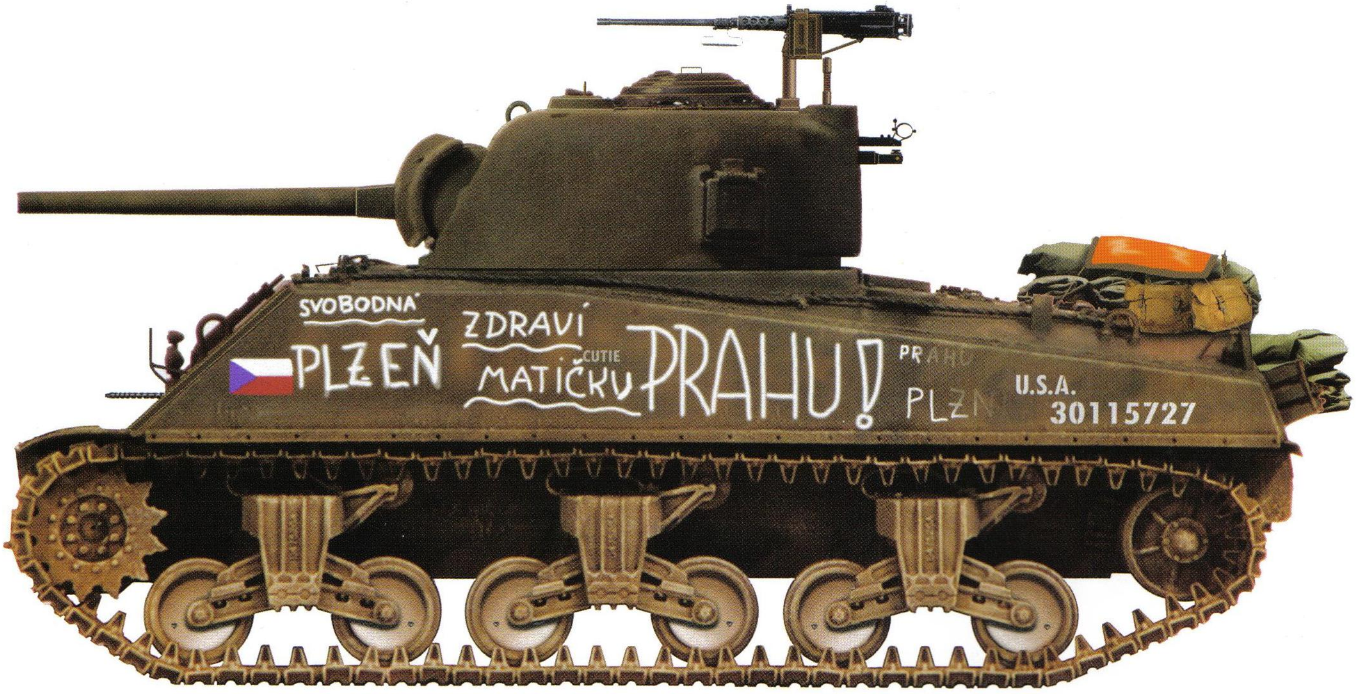
T26E1/E4 Super Pershing, Co. I, 33rd Armored Regt., 3rd Armored Division, Germany, April 1945

The original pilot of the Pershing tank series was retrofitted with a long-barrel 90mm gun to serve as a test-bed for the T26E4 series, and sent to Europe for trials. It was commanded by Sgt. Joseph Matira and served with the 33rd Armored Regiment in the last three weeks of the war, knocking out several German tanks. The ordnance teams in the division fitted the tank with addition armor plate over the gun mantlet, including odd "bat-wings" on either side of the turret, as well as additional armor plates on the bow. The tank was later finished in the usual First US Army scheme of black over olive drab, and had the letter "A" crudely painted on the left side of the gun mantlet armor plate, and the number 2 painted on the left side bat wing as seen here. The lower inset drawing shows the bumper codes carried on the lower lip of the appliqué armor on the glacis plate starting with the unit codes and the vehicle registration number in the center.



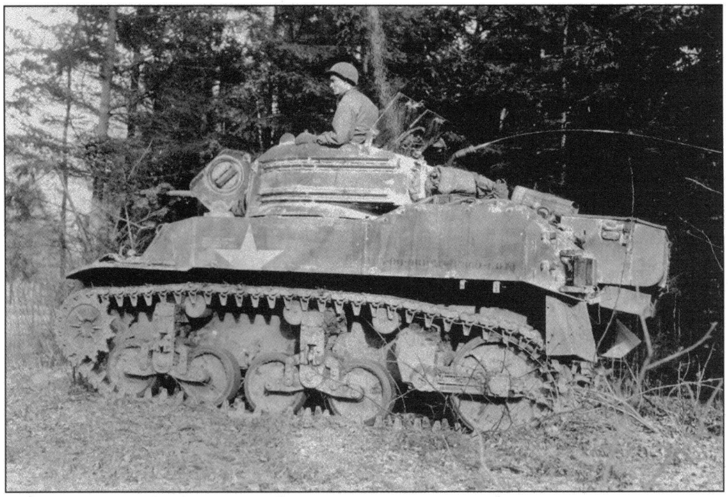
M24 Light Tank, 23rd Cavalry Reconaissance Squadron, 16th Armored Division, Plzen, Czechoslovakia, May 1945

This M24 is finished in the black over olive drab color scheme officially sanctioned for tanks of the First US Army, and was probably applied when the unit was attached in early April. It is named "Panther Pup", a popular nickname for the M24 in US service due to the similarity in appearance with the German Panther tank.

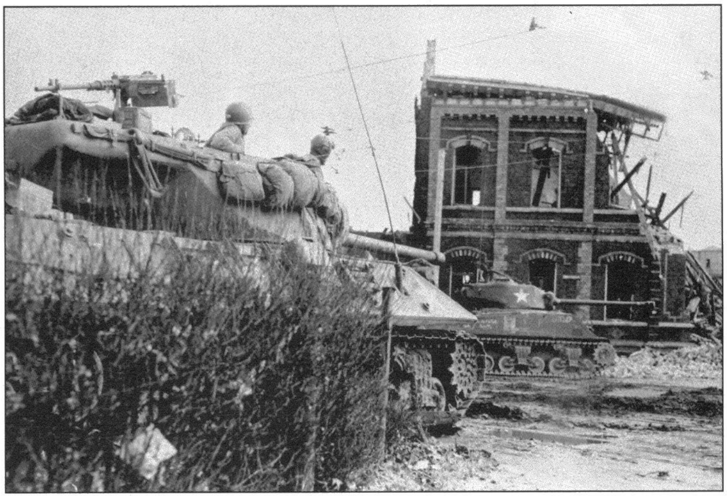


M4A3 Medium tank, 16th Armored Division, Plzen, Czechoslovakia, May 1945

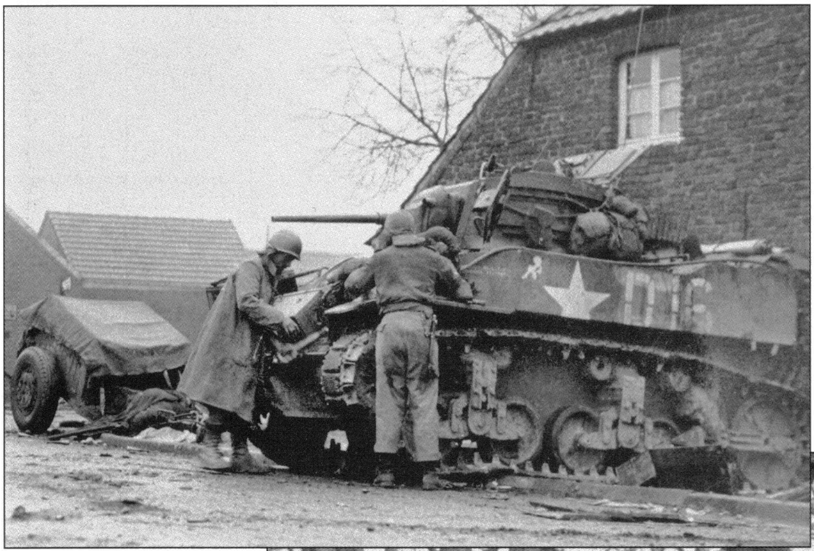
Following the liberation of Plzen (Pilsen) in early May 1945, Czech civilians decorated some of the tanks of the 16th Armored Division with slogans and greetings, as well as the Czechoslovak flag in this case. This tank belongs to Co. C of one of the division's tank battalions judging from the vehicle name on the hull side, "Cutie".



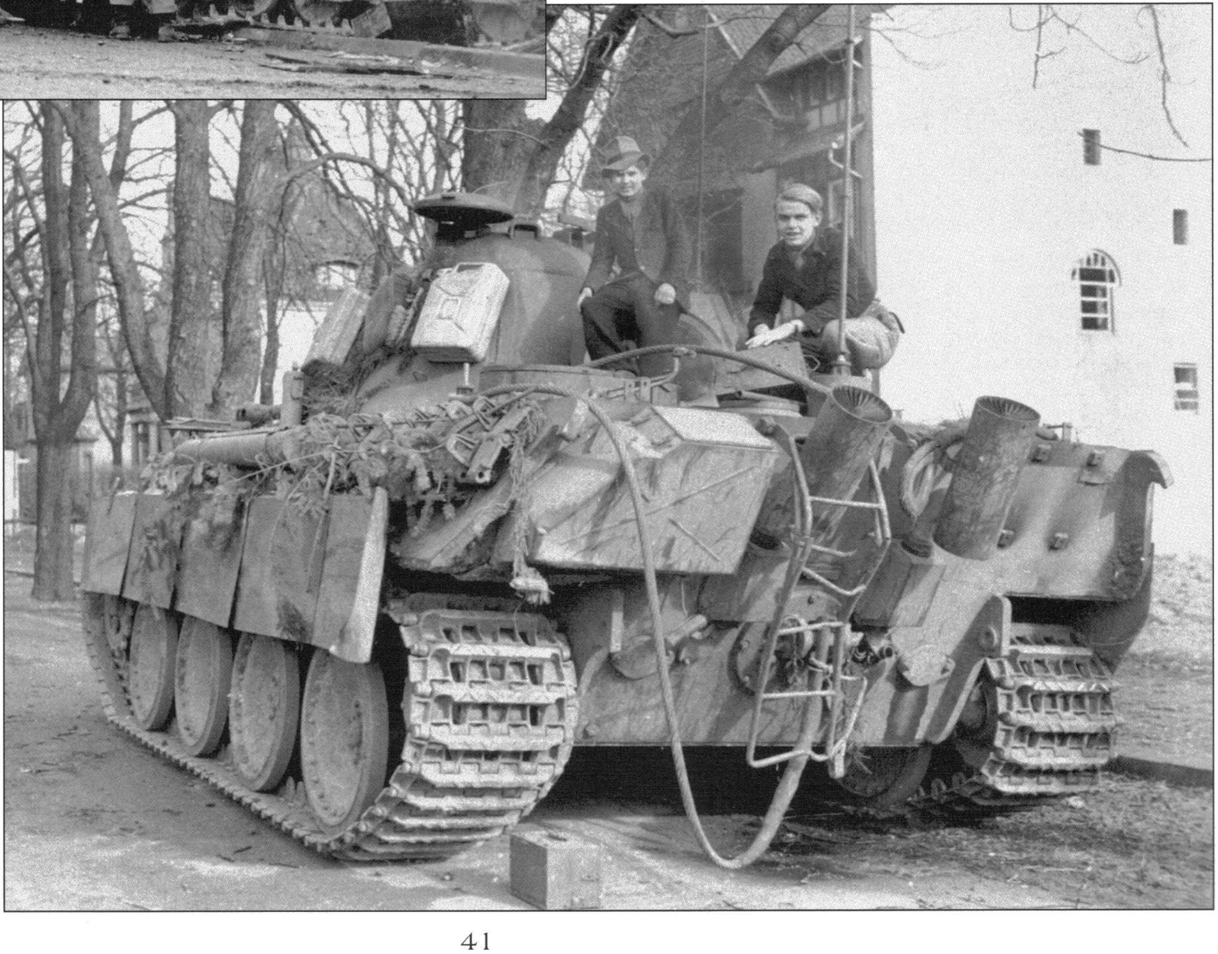
This M5A1 light tank of the 701st Tank Battalion at Krefeld with the 102nd Division on 2 March 1945 is a good example of the final production configuration with the added rear stowage bin and the late pattern wheels. (USMA)



A M36 90mm GMC of the 771st Tank Destroyer Battalion stands guard at a roadblock in Krefeld while in the background, a M4A3 (76mm) of the 701st Tank Battalion passes by. Both units were supporting the 102nd Division at the time. (USMA)

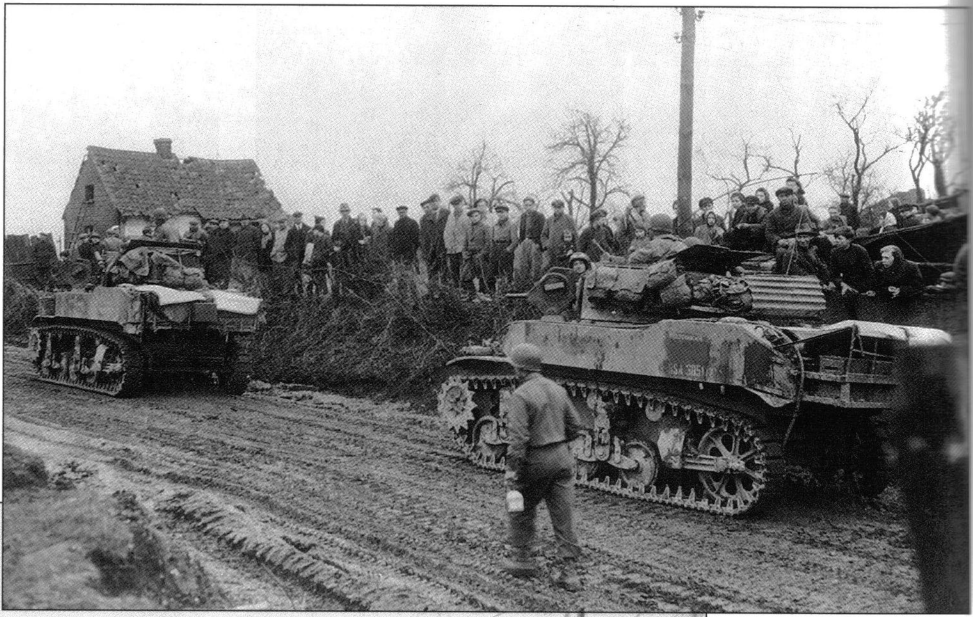


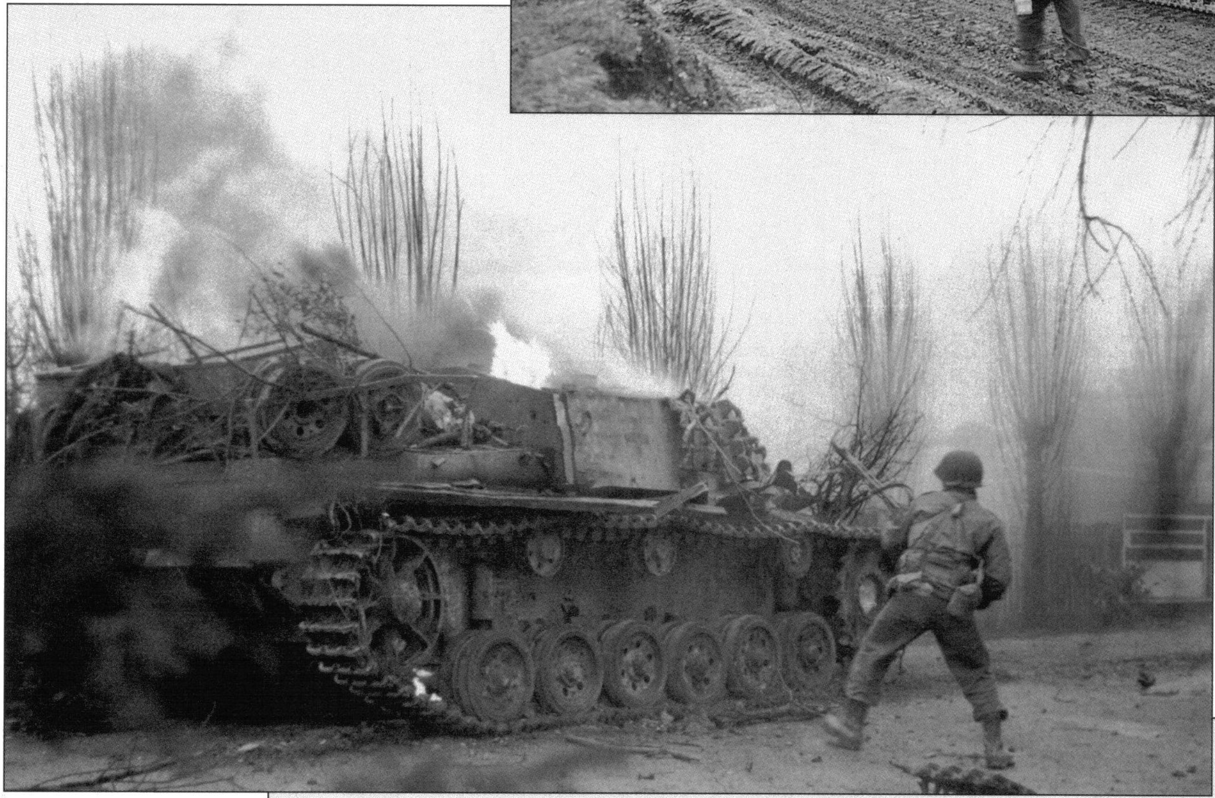
The crew of a M5A1 light tank of the 5th Armored Division perform household chores on their tank during a lull in the fighting near Sevelen on 4 March 1945 to the west of the Essen industrial belt. The vehicle carries a tactical "speed" number of D-16 and a pin-up cartoon to the left of the star. (USMA)



This Panther Ausf.G was found abandoned in Krefeld on 3 March 1945 after the fighting for the nearby Rhine bridge by the 2nd Armored Division. It is a rare example of one of the Panthers fitted for infra-red night fighting equipment. Careful inspection of the right hull rear shows where the IR equipment box was fitted, though it is missing in this photo. (USMA)

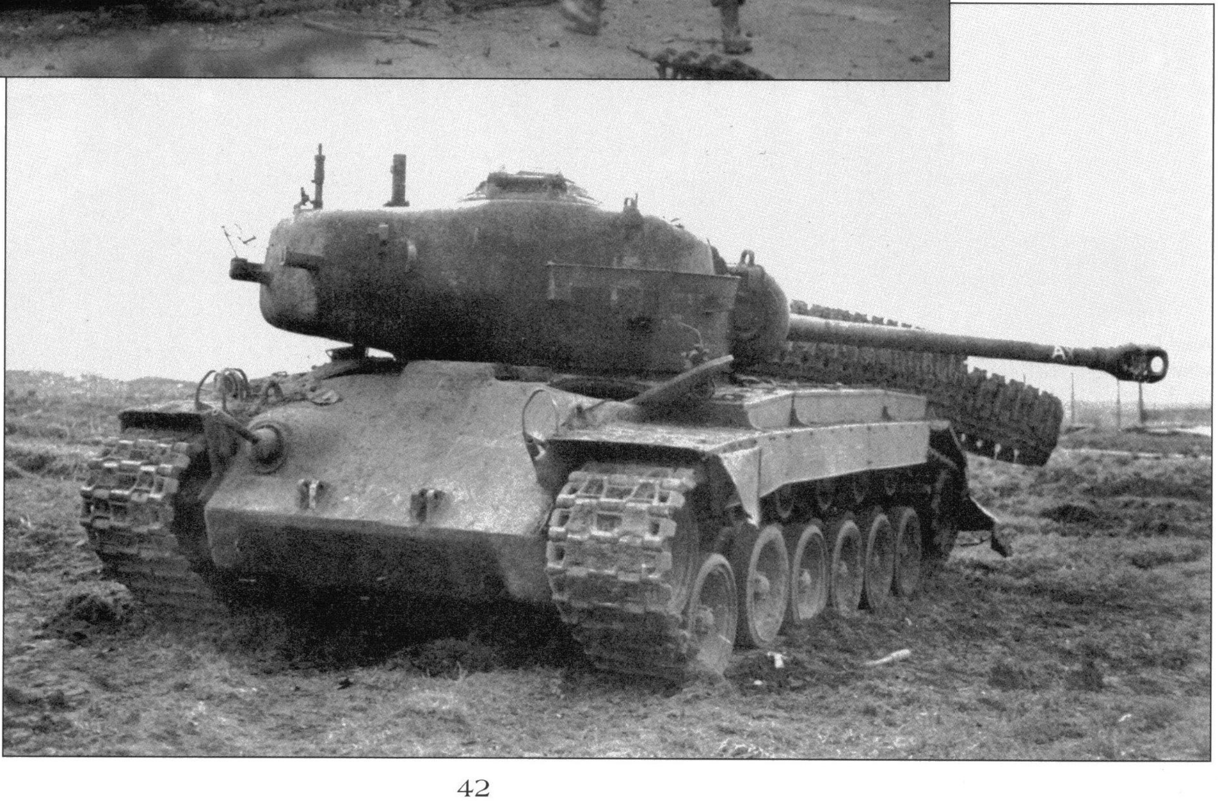
A pair of M5A1 of the 3rd Armored Division push forward on a muddy road on the outskirts of Cologne on 4 March 1945 while curious civilians look on. The tank to the right has a large field expedient stowage bin added to the rear. (NARA)



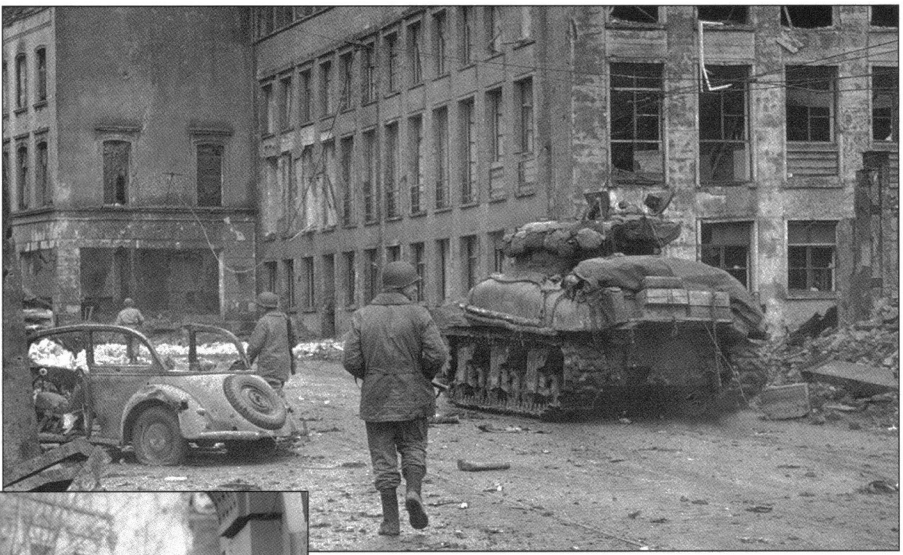


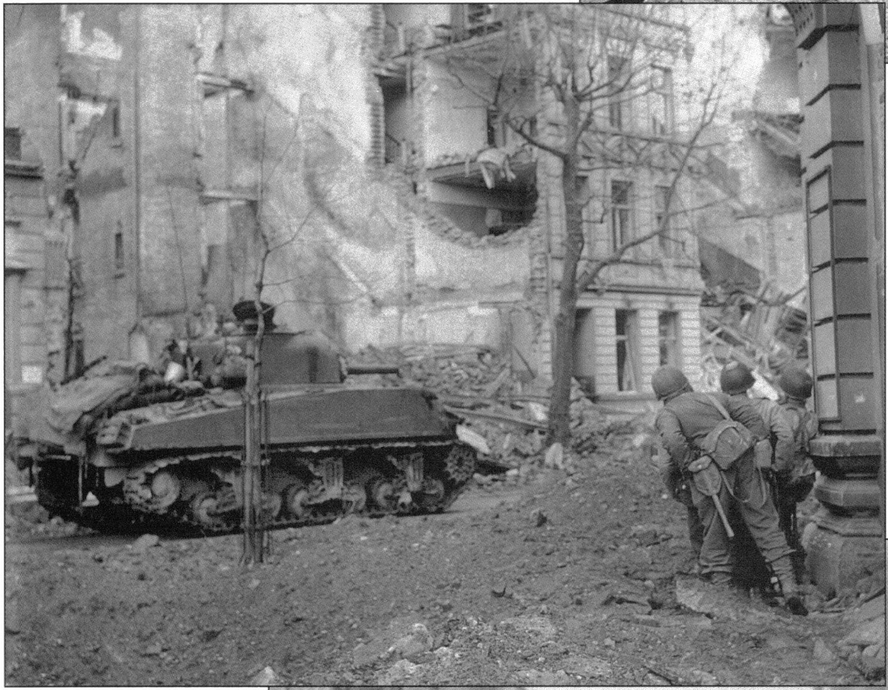
A GI advances cautiously on a burning StuG.III Ausf.G that has been knocked out in combat with the 5th Armored Division during the fighting on 4 March 1945 near Repelen on the outskirts of the Essen industrial belt. (NARA)

Although two T26E3 were knocked out in the fighting on the approaches to Cologne, only one was a complete loss, this tank, serial number 25 from Co. H, 33rd Armored Regiment, 3rd Armored Division. It was hit a point blank range of about 200 yards by an 88mm round from a Nashorn self-propelled tank destroyer which penetrated the lower bow armor under the transmission, setting off the ammunition in the floor. The round passed between the driver's legs, but surprisingly, the entire crew survived. (Patton Museum)

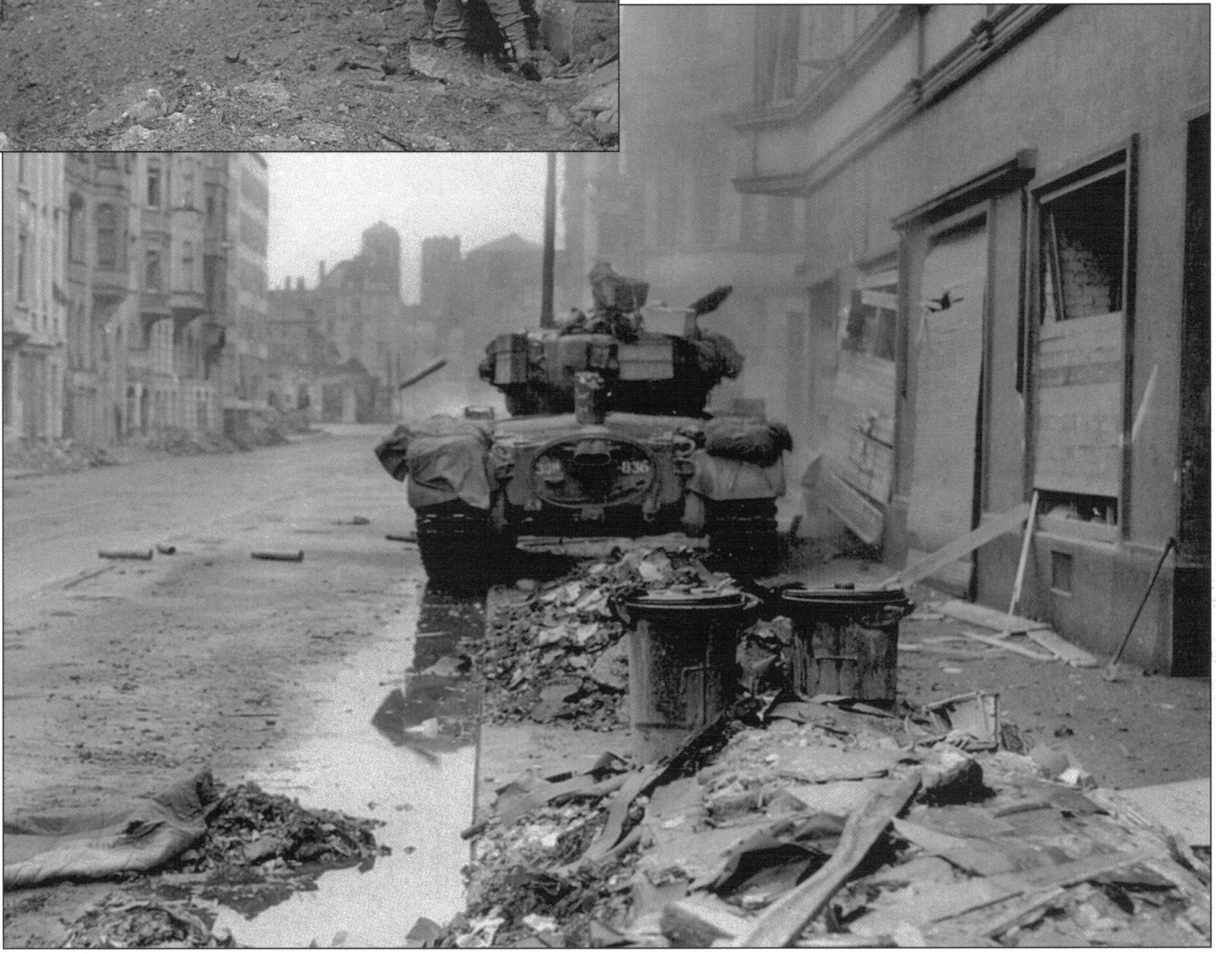


A M4A1 of the 750th Tank Battalion moves forward in support of the 104th Division in the rubble of Cologne on 6 March 1945. (NARA)

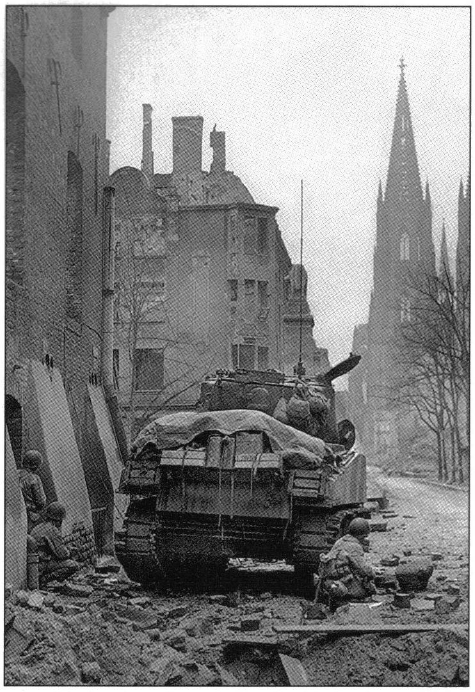




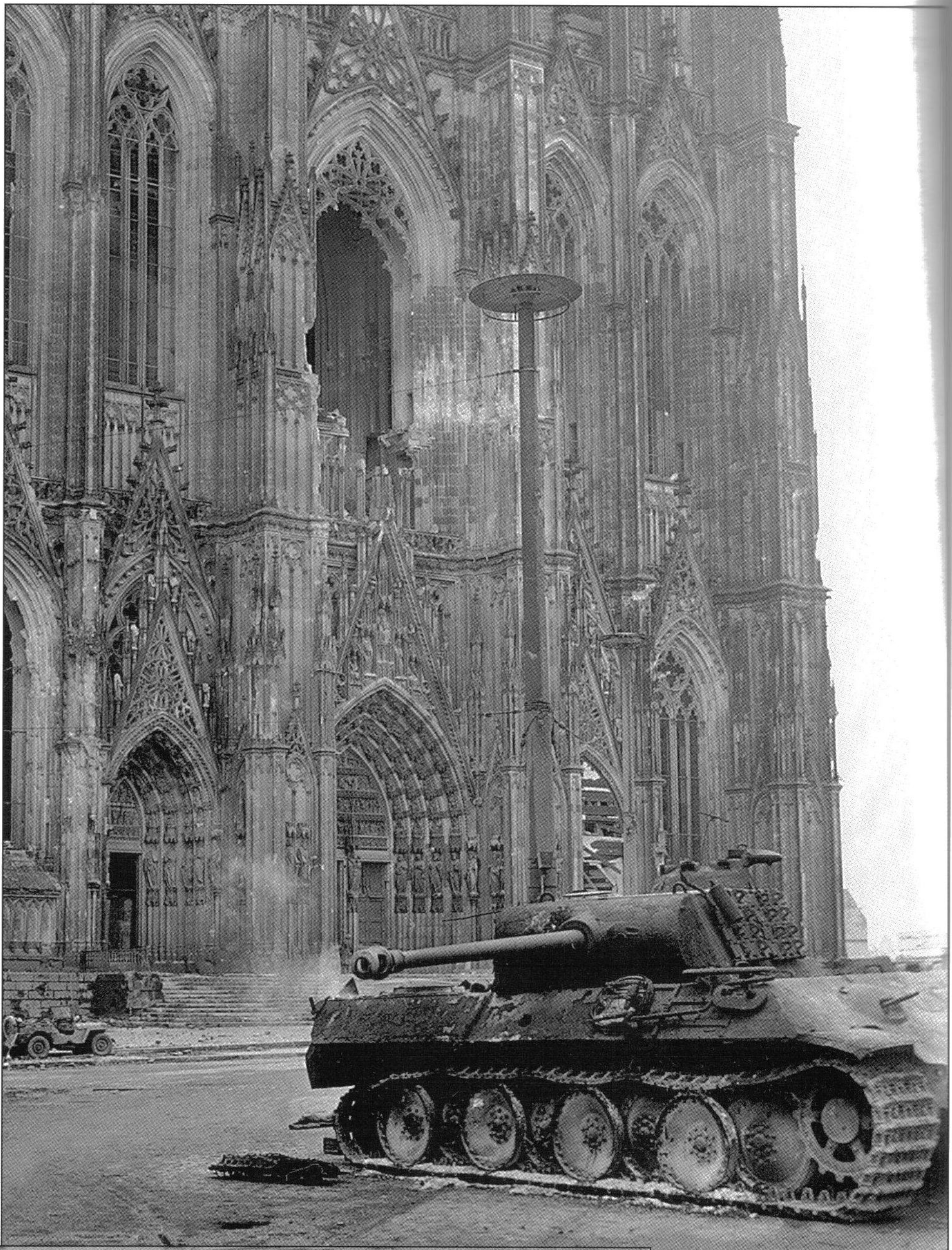
GIs of the 104th Division take cover in the ruins of a post office in Cologne as a M4A3 105mm assault gun of the 750th Tank Battalion advances down the rubble-strewn streets. (NARA)



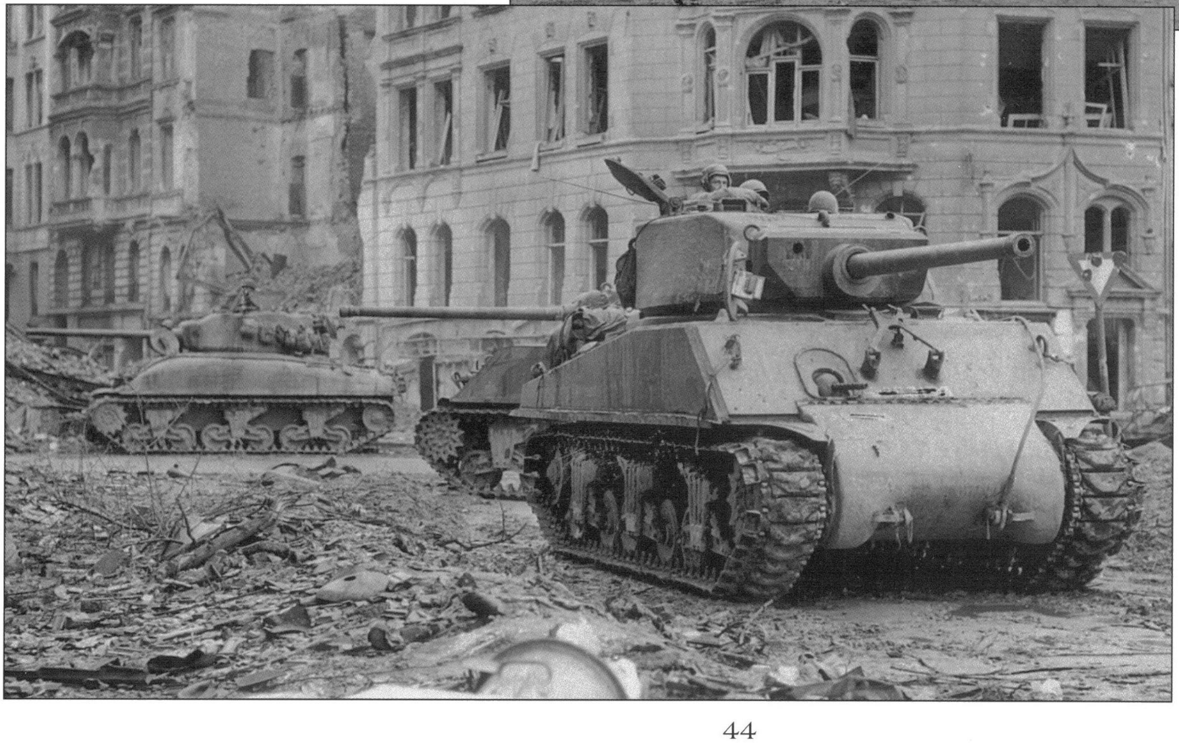
This T26E3, serial number 36 from Co. D, 32nd Armored Regt., 3rd Armored Division was one of the first to see combat. Here, it is seen on the streets of Cologne during the fighting on 6 March 1945. This particular tank knocked out two Tiger I tanks during the Cologne battles. (NARA)



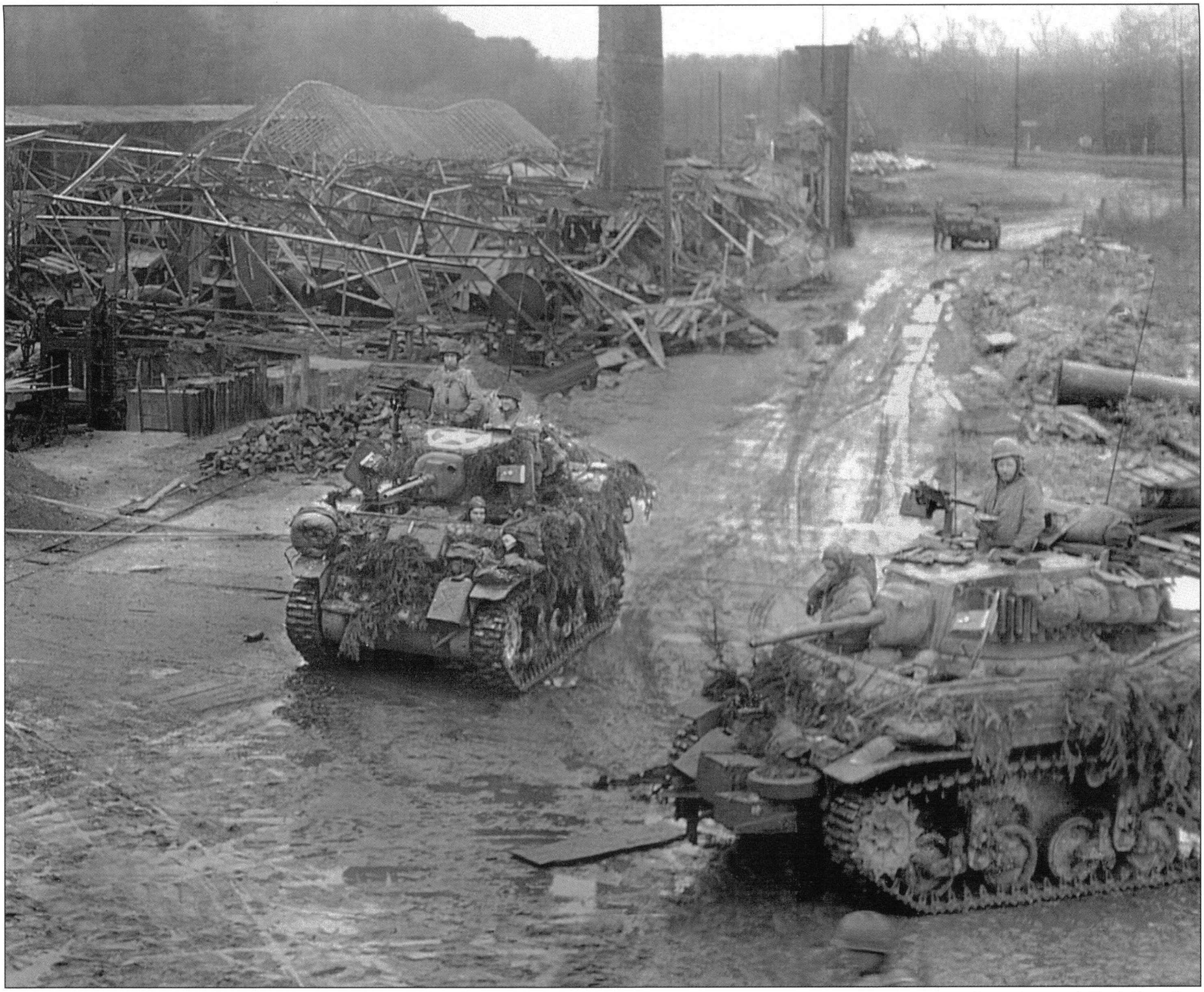
GIs hunker down behind a M4A3 (76mm) on the approaches to Cologne cathedral on 6 March 1945. The attack on the city included tank units from the 3rd Armored Division as well as infantry support units like the 750th Tank Battalion with the 104th Division. (NARA)



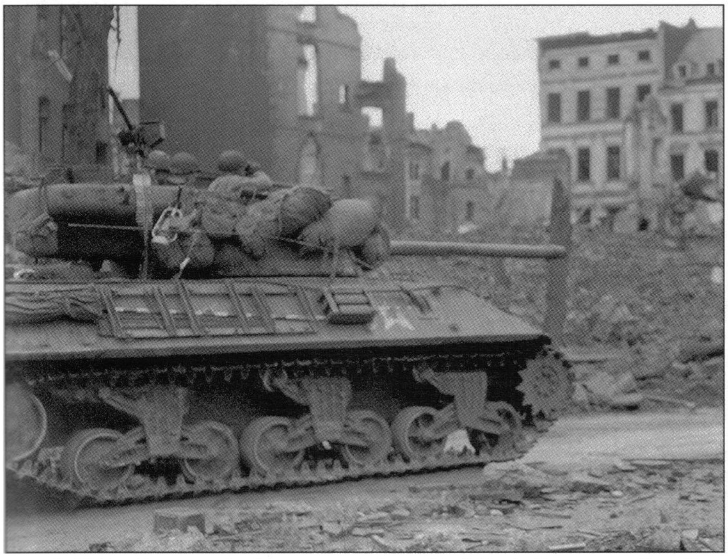
During the fighting in Cologne, a Panther Ausf.A tank of II./Pz.Rgt.33, 9.Panzer-Division took up a position in front of the cathedral. It knocked out two approaching US M4 tanks, but a T26E3 commanded by Sgt. Bob Early from Co. E, 32nd Armored Regiment, 3rd Armored Division charged the Panther from the side. The Panther was still slowly turning its turret towards its opponents when the first of three rounds slammed into the tank, causing an internal fire which burned it out as seen here a few days later. (NARA)



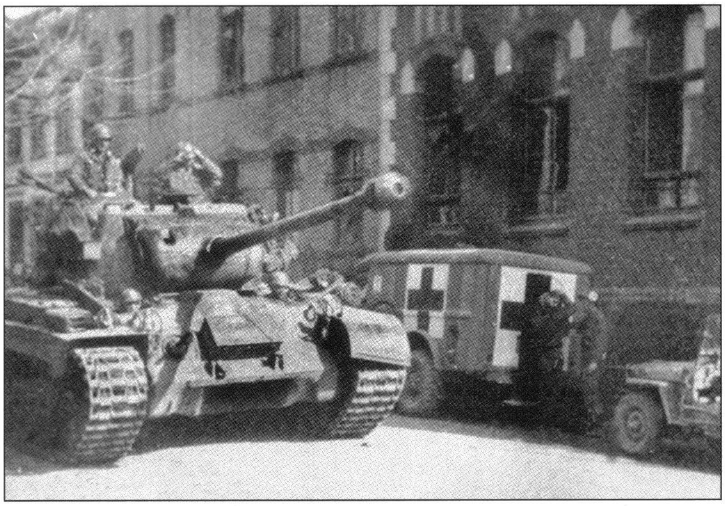
A M4A3E2 assault tank of the 3rd Armored Division moves through the ruins of Cologne on 6 March 1945. This is one of about a hundred M4A3E2 assault tanks that were re-armed with 76mm guns in February 1945 by 12th Army Group ordnance units. (NARA)



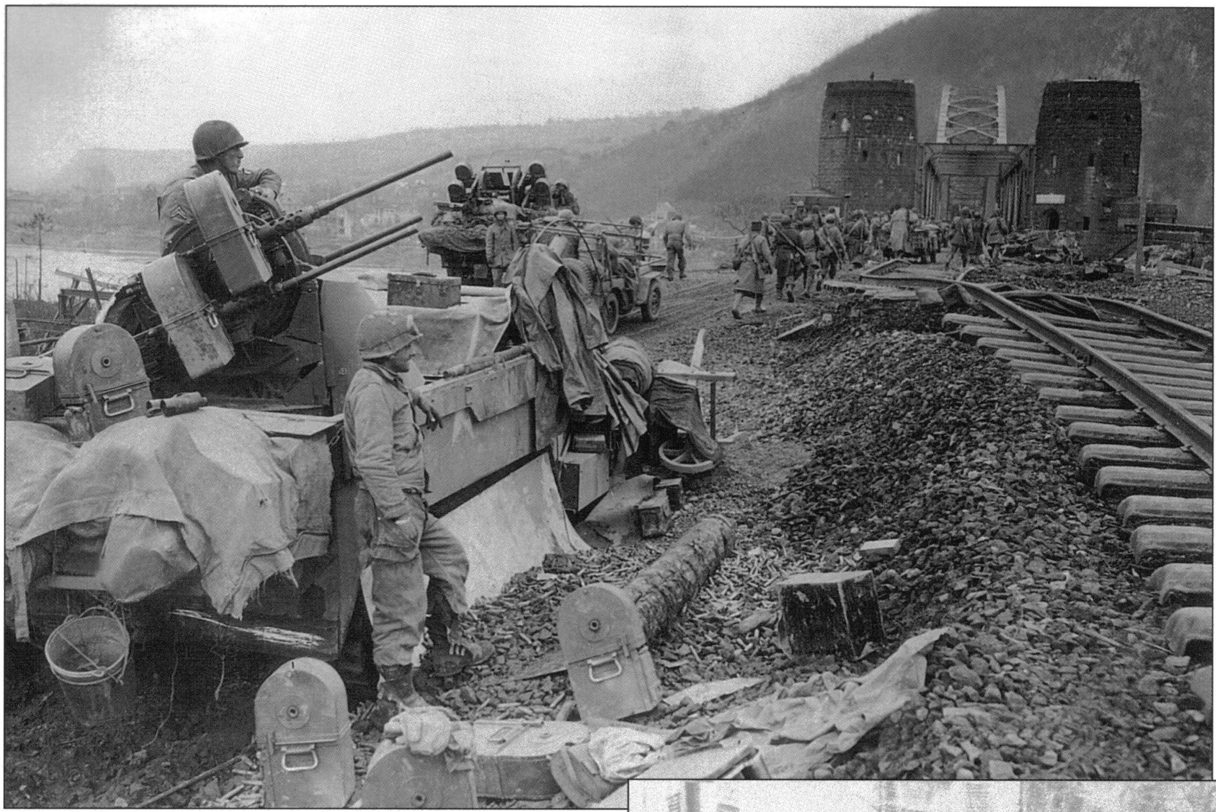
A pair of M5A1 pass through a destroyed factory in the outskirts of Bad Godesberg on 7 March 1945. They are probably from the 746th Tank Battalion which was supporting the 9th Infantry Division in its attempts to capture the town that day during the push to the Rhine alongside the neighboring 9th Armored Division. (NARA)



A M36 90mm tank destroyer of the 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion searches for targets in the ruins of Cologne on 6 March 1945. It is fitted with duckbill extended end connectors, and the lower hull has been cut away to fit these. (NARA)

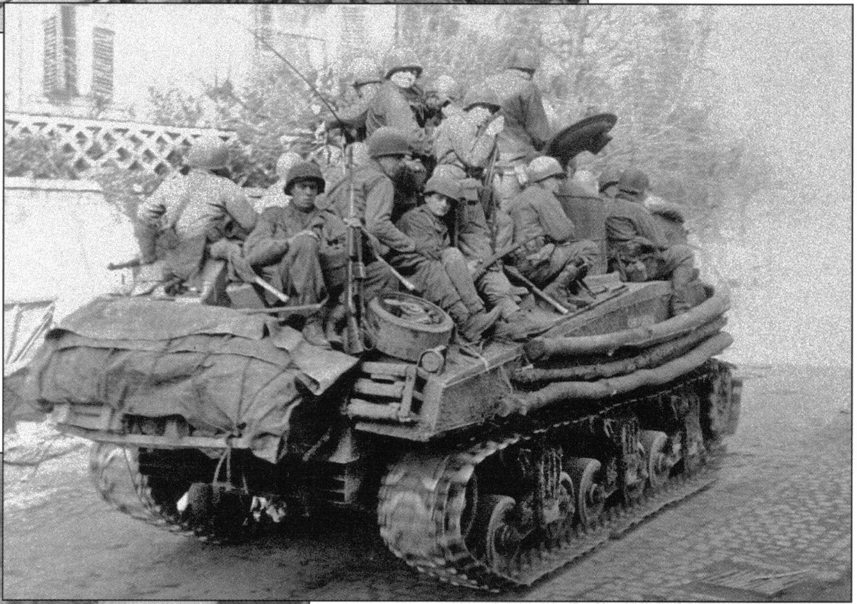


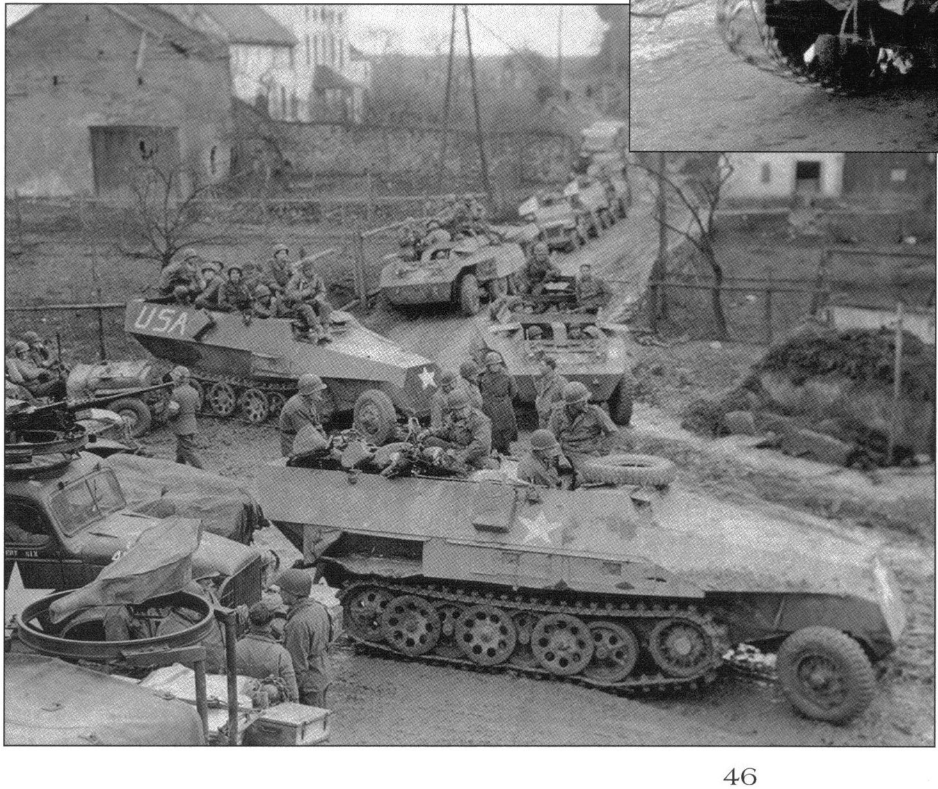
On 7 March 1945, Task Force Engeman of the 9th Armored Division surprised the German defenders of the Ludendorf bridge at Remagen, and seized the Rhine crossing after the demolition charges failed. The attack was led by Lt. John Grimball's platoon of four T26E3 tanks of the 14th Tank Battalion, 9th Armored Division, including this one, photographed a few days later in the town. (MHI)



Hitler was incensed at the first crossing of the Rhine at Remagen, and ordered extensive Luftwaffe attacks against the bridge, including jet bombers. As a result, the US Army moved a considerable amount of anti-aircraft artillery into the area, including these M16 quad. .50 cal machine gun half-tracks. (NARA)

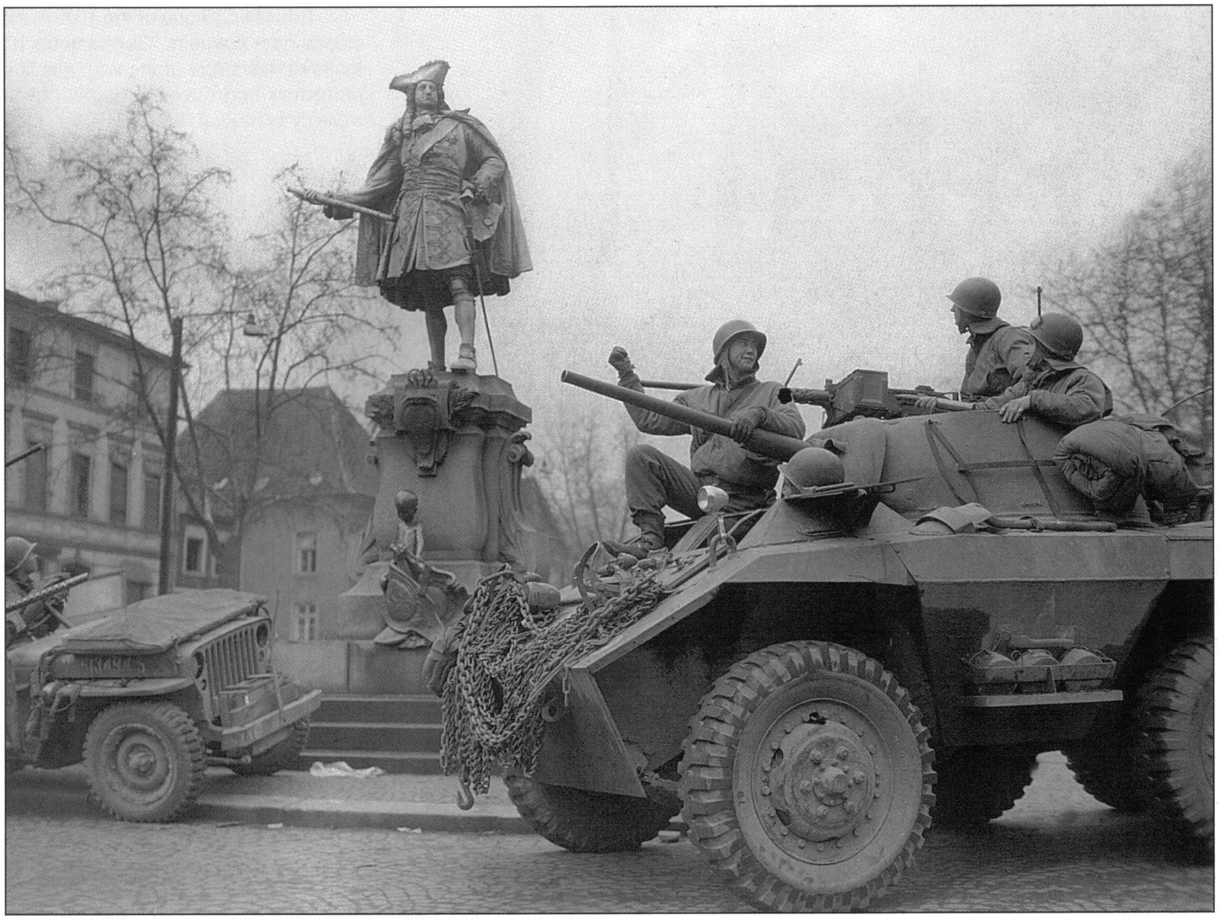
A squad of infantry from the 99th Division rides on the back of a M4A3 of the 786th Tank Battalion during the efforts to reinforce the Remagen bridgehead. It carries corduroy matting on the hull side and the tracks are fitted with extended end connectors. (MHI)

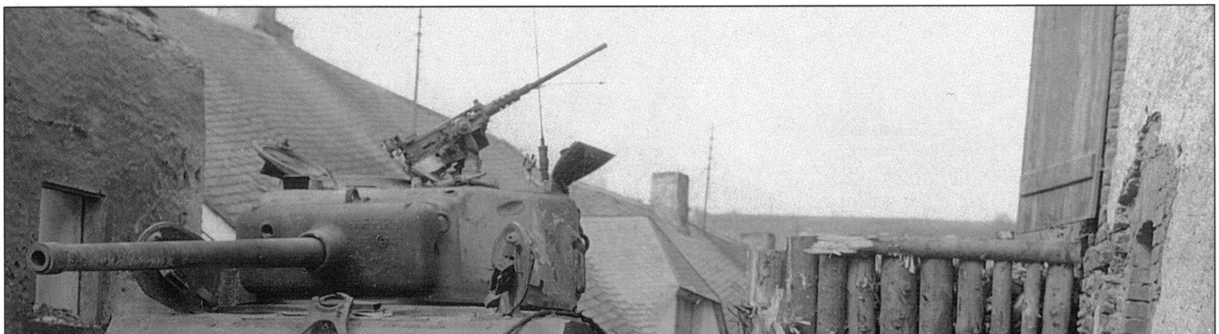




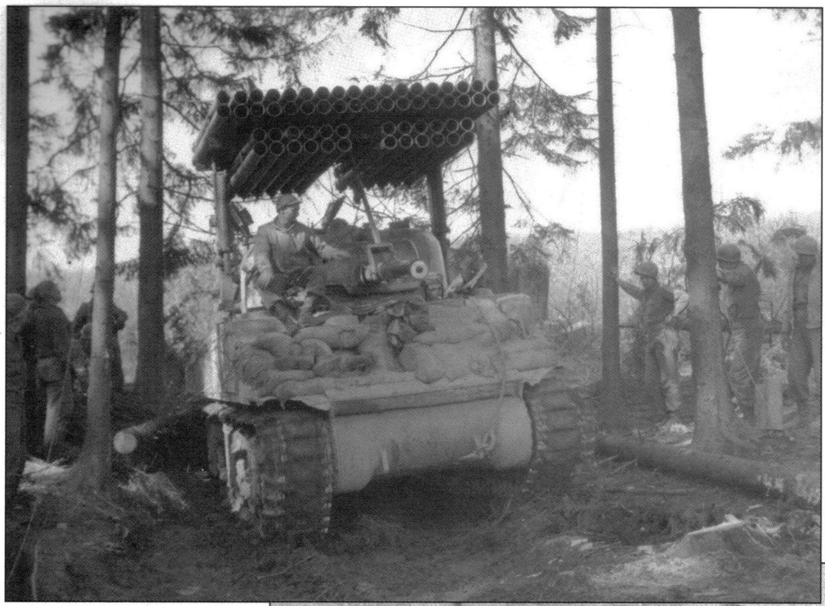
US infantry units occasionally made use of captured German vehicles like this pair of Sd.Kfz.251 Ausf.D of the 5th Infantry Division moving through Trier on 7 March 1945 a week after the city had fallen. Judging from the vehicle nearby, they may be part of the divisions' 5th Recon Troop. (NARA)

A M8 light armored car and bantam from a cavalry recon squadron of the 9th Army stop in the town square of Moers on 8 March 1945. The town had been captured on 5 March by the 84th Division, but like many Rhine towns, the bridge across the river had already been demolished by retreating German troops. (NARA)

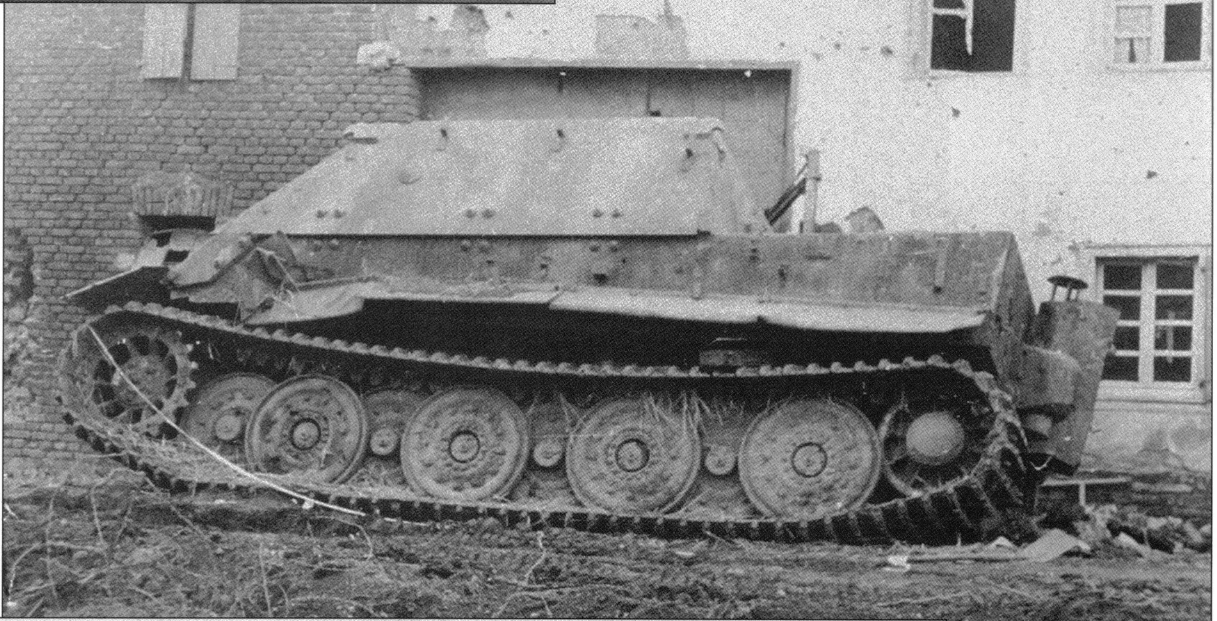




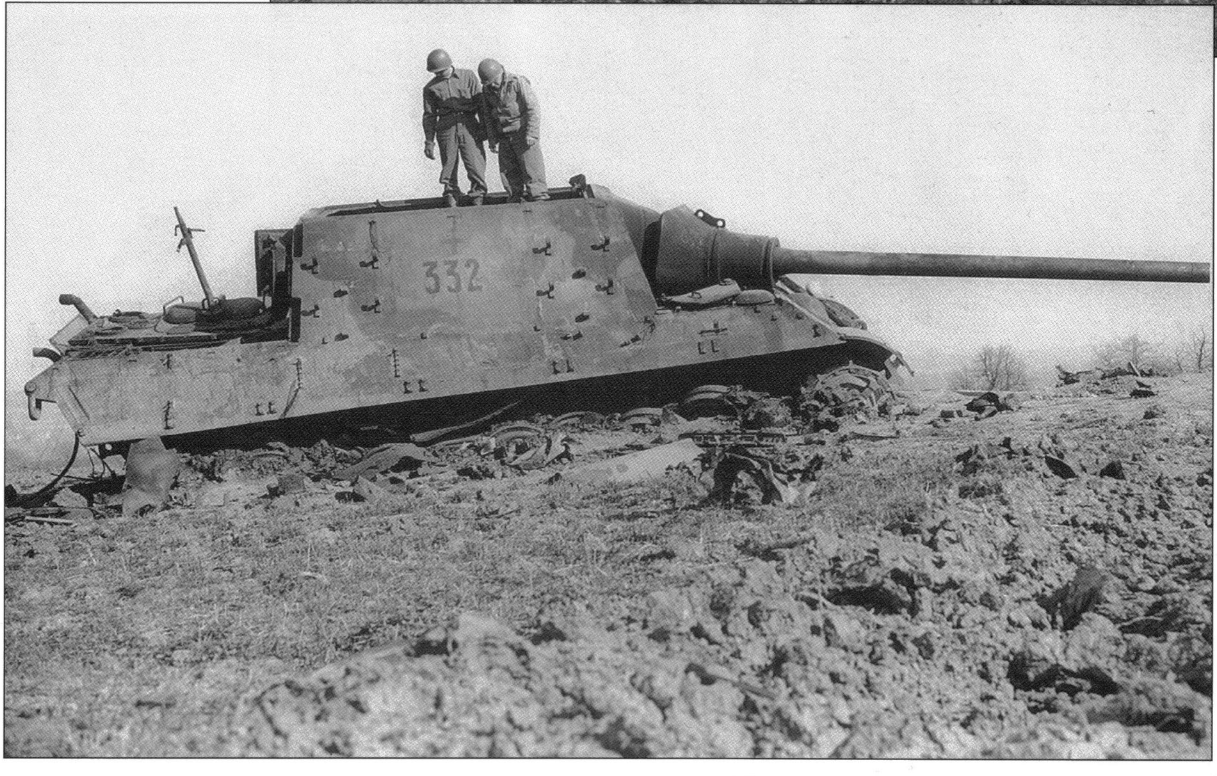
A GI of the 94th Division walks through a gap in a road-block in Lampaden past a M4A3 (76mm) of the 778th Tank Battalion that has been knocked out by two gun penetrations through the transmission cover during the fighting for the Saarbrucken bridgehead on 9 March 1945.



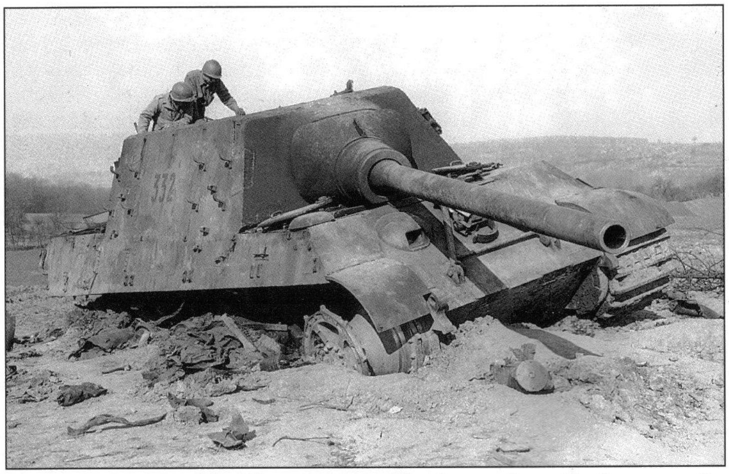
This M4 Calliope of the 10th Armored Division is waiting in the woods near Losheim, Germany on 10 March 1944. Like many M4 tanks at this stage of the war, it is fitted with sand-bags for added protection and duck-bill end connectors on the tracks for better mobility in mud. (NARA)



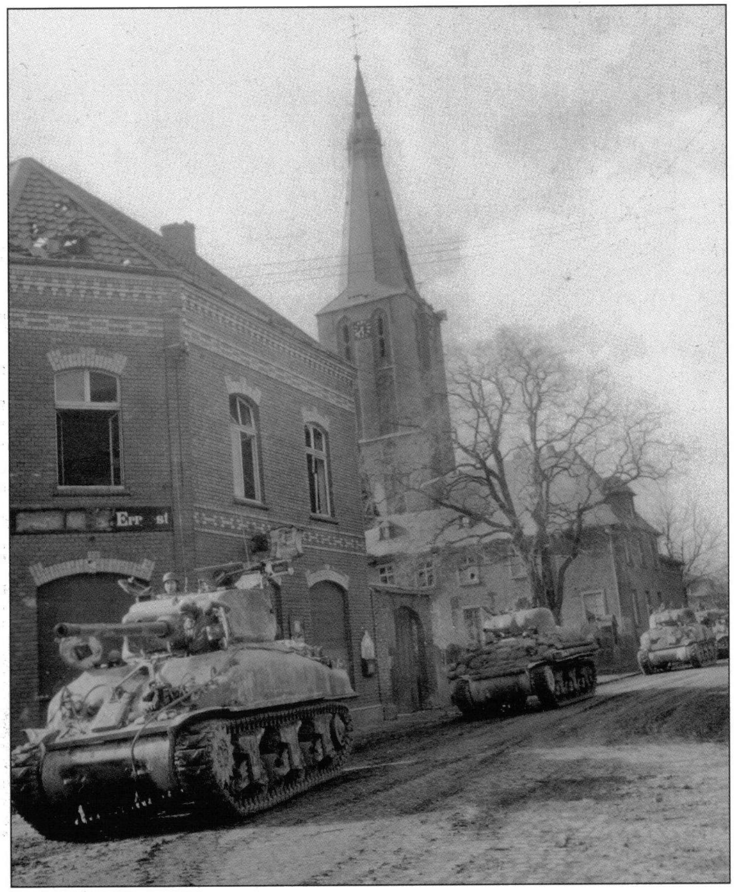
One of the more unusual armored vehicles active in the fighting in the Ruhr was the Sturmtiger serving with Kp.1001 which went into operation near Duren in February 1945. Only a handful of vehicles were operational, and they were abandoned in early May 1945 near Bonn after they ran out of ammunition. (MHI)



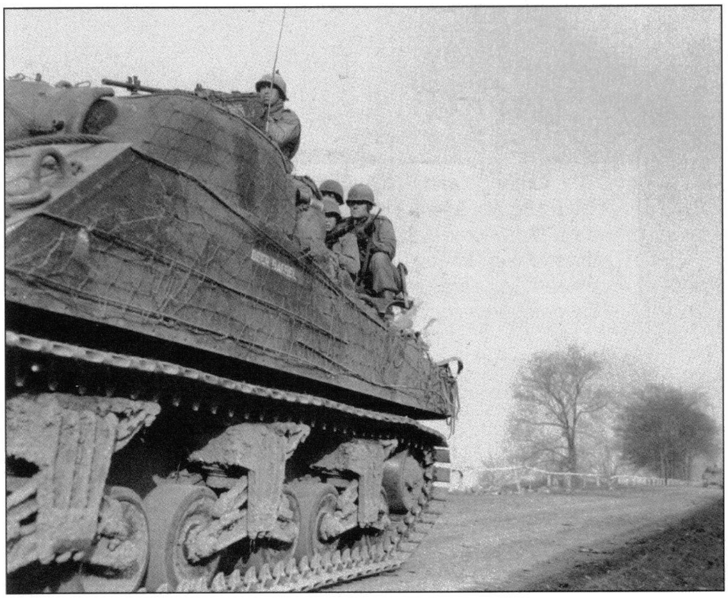
On 17 March, a pair of Jagdtiger heavy tank destroyers of the s.Pz.Jg.Abt.653 broke down near Morsbronn-les-Bains and were abandoned by their crews. Before departing, the crews triggered demolition charges which set off the vehicle ammunition, blowing off the roof and setting fire to the vehicles. This Jagdtiger, commanded by Fw. Telgmann has the tactical number 332 and is being examined by GIs. (NARA)



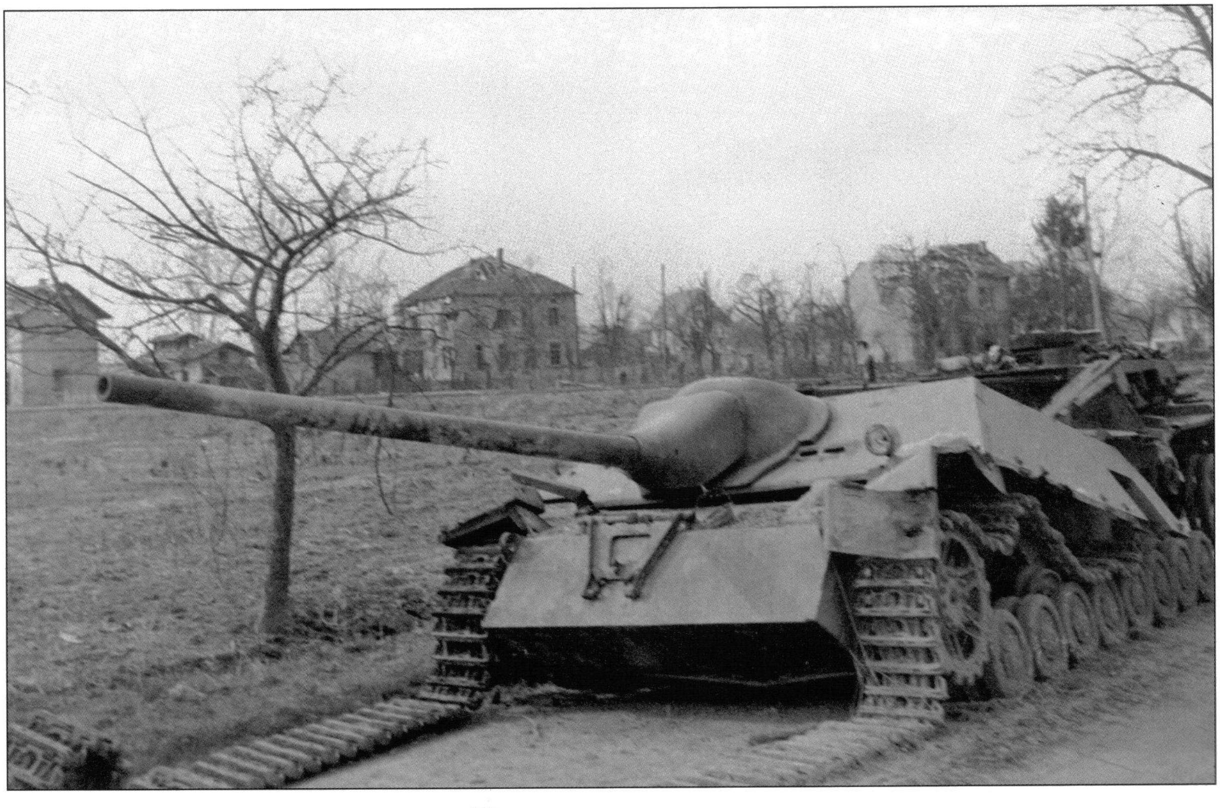
Another view of Jagdtiger 332 near Morsbronn shows the heavy cradle fitted to the front of the vehicle to lock the gun barrel in place during travel. (NARA)



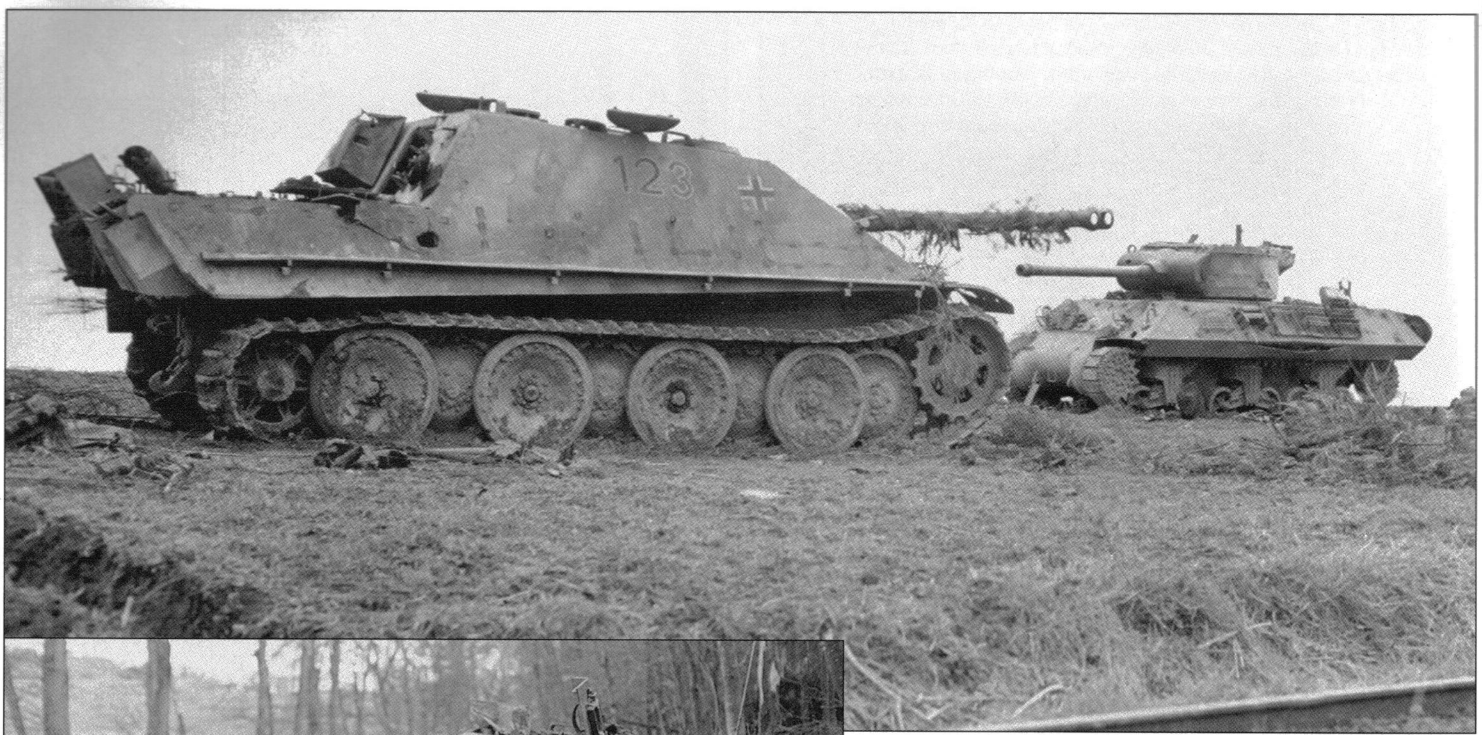
A battered old M4A1 (76mm) leads a column of tanks through the town of Kerpen on 16 March 1945 on the approaches to Cologne. These are probably from the 3rd Armored Division. (NARA)



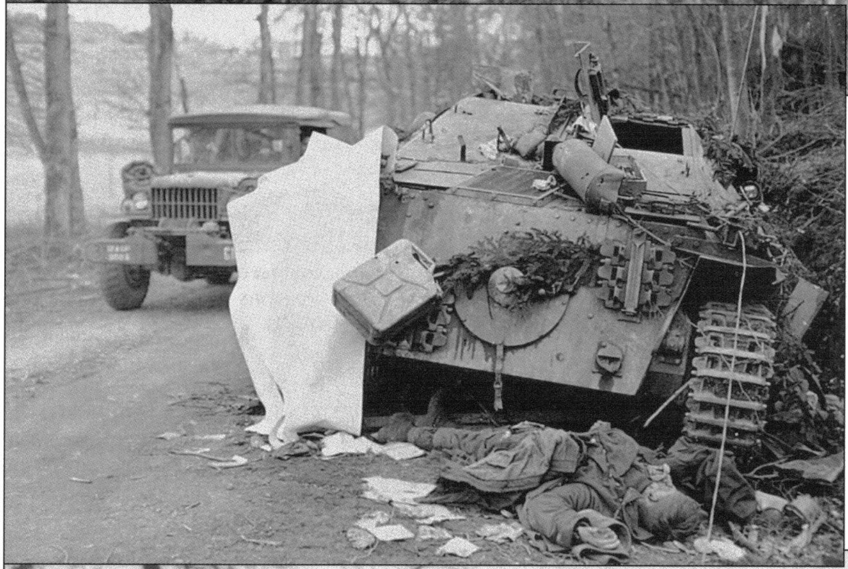
A squad from the 394th Infantry, 99th Division rides a M4A3 of Co. B, 786th Tank Battalion named "Beer Barrel" during operations near Honningen on 16 March 1945. The town fell that day after heavy combat, part of an effort to expand the Remagen bridgehead on the east bank of the Rhine. (MHI)



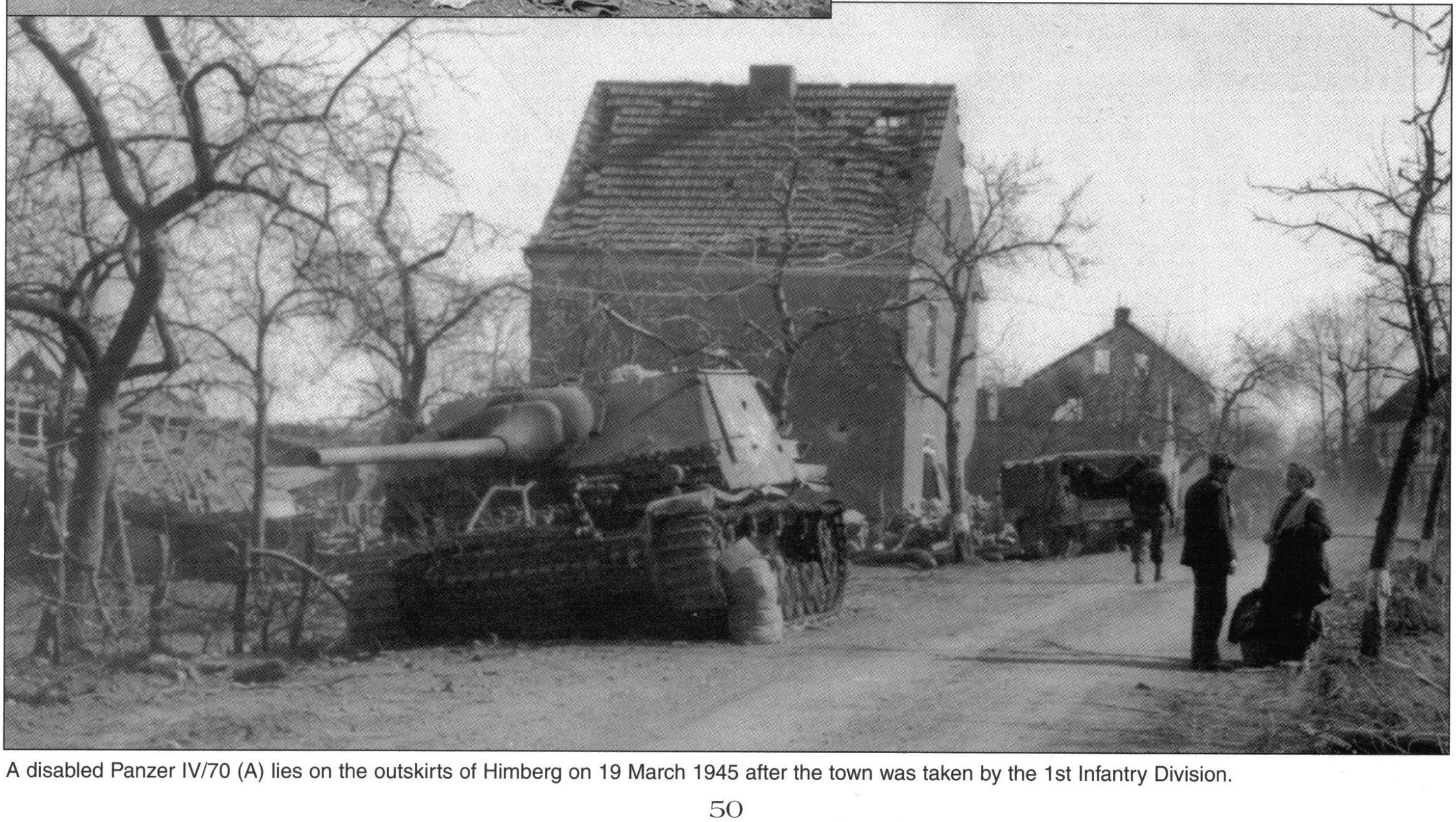
The 14th Armored Division crossed the German border near the old fortress town of Wissembourg in Alsace on 15-16 March on the beginning of its offensive towards Neustadt, and this Panzer IV/70 (V) tank destroyer was one of the first armored vehicles overcome during the attack. (Patton Museum)



Victor and vanquished. A Jagdpanther of 1/s.Pz.Jg.Abt.654 of Kampfgruppe Paffrath lies by the roadside as a M36 90mm tank destroyer advances past near Kaimig-Ginsterhain on 13 March 1945. Several penetrations are evident on the rear hull side. This was one of three Jagdpanthers knocked out that day. (NARA)

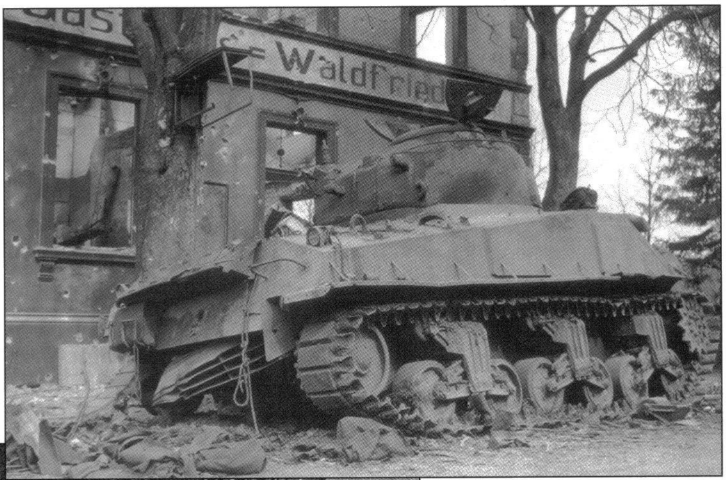


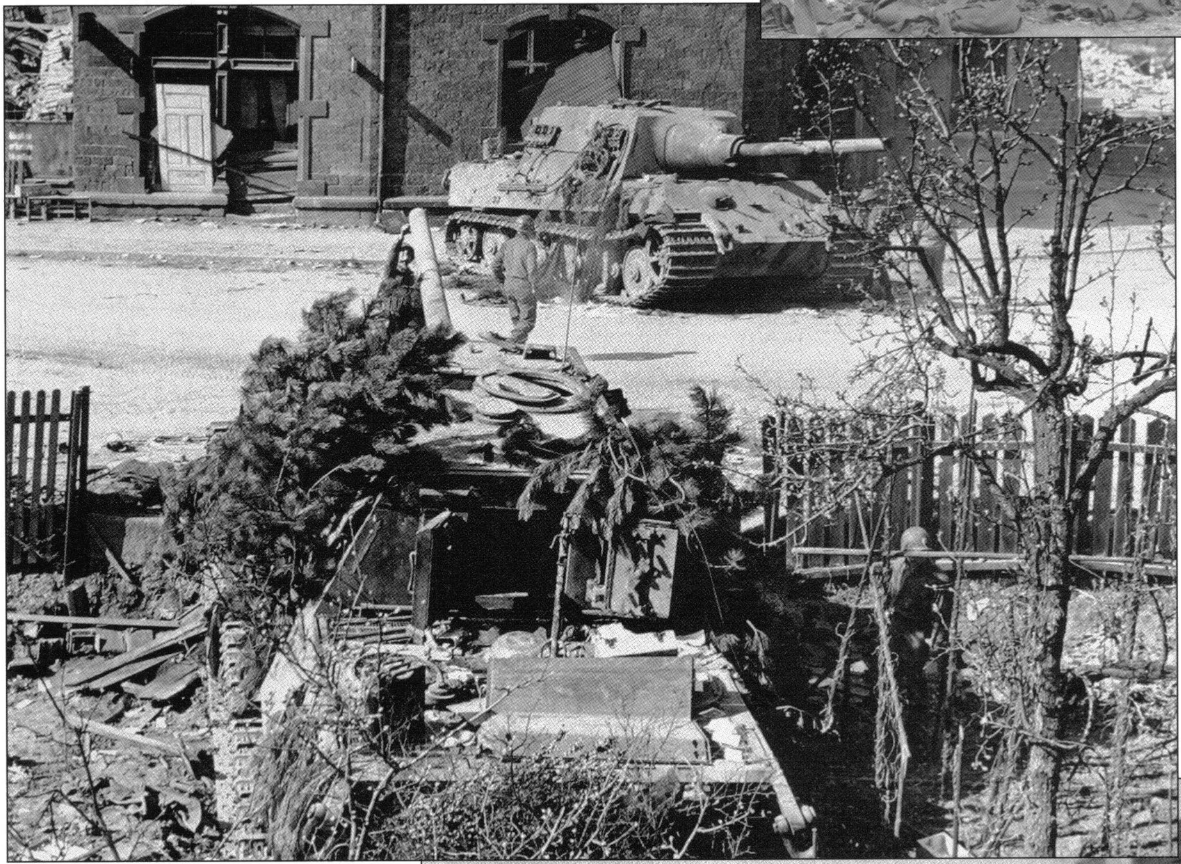
A 1/2 ton truck of the 26th Division drives by a destroyed Jagd.Pz.38(t) during the division's attack from Saarlautern towards the Rhine river with Patton's Third Army on 18 March 1945. (Patton Museum)



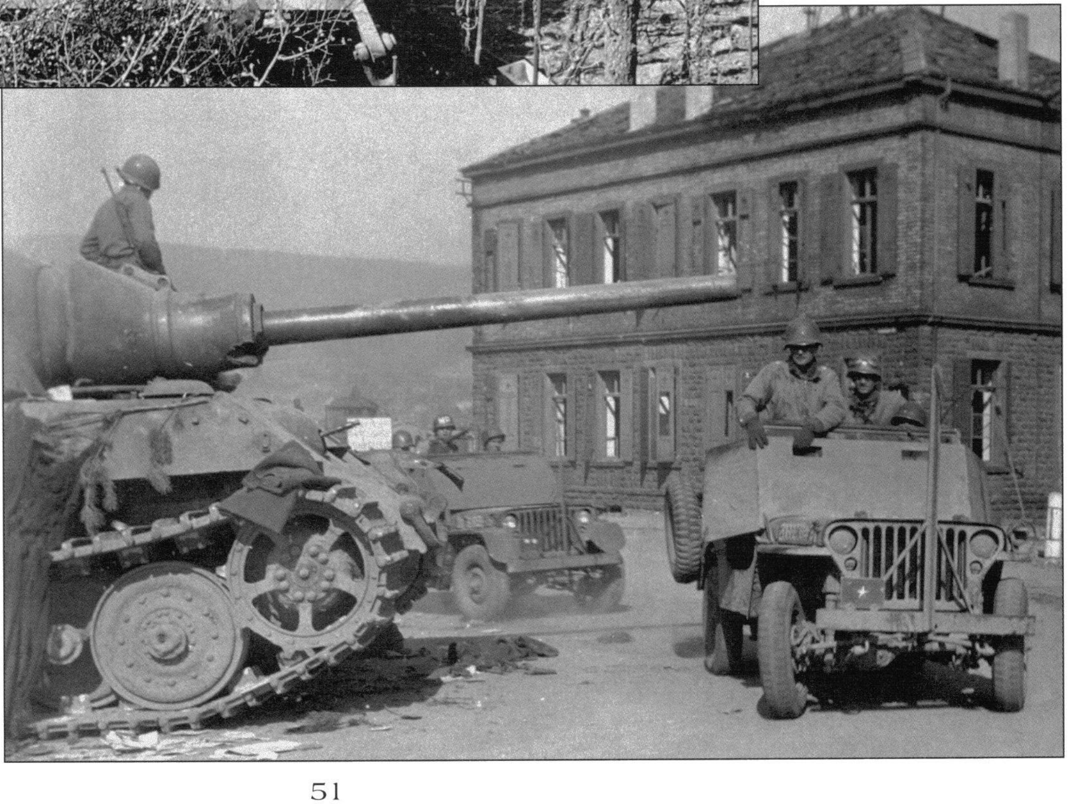
A disabled Panzer IV/70 (A) lies on the outskirts of Himberg on 19 March 1945 after the town was taken by the 1st Infantry Division.

A M4A3 of the 745th Tank Battalion knocked out while supporting the 1st Infantry Division during the fighting in Rottbitze on 20 March 1945. The M4A3 is an early dry stowage type that has been rebuilt with appliqué armor, exhaust deflector, extended fenders and duckbills. This configuration was far less common than the wet stowage M4A3. (NARA)

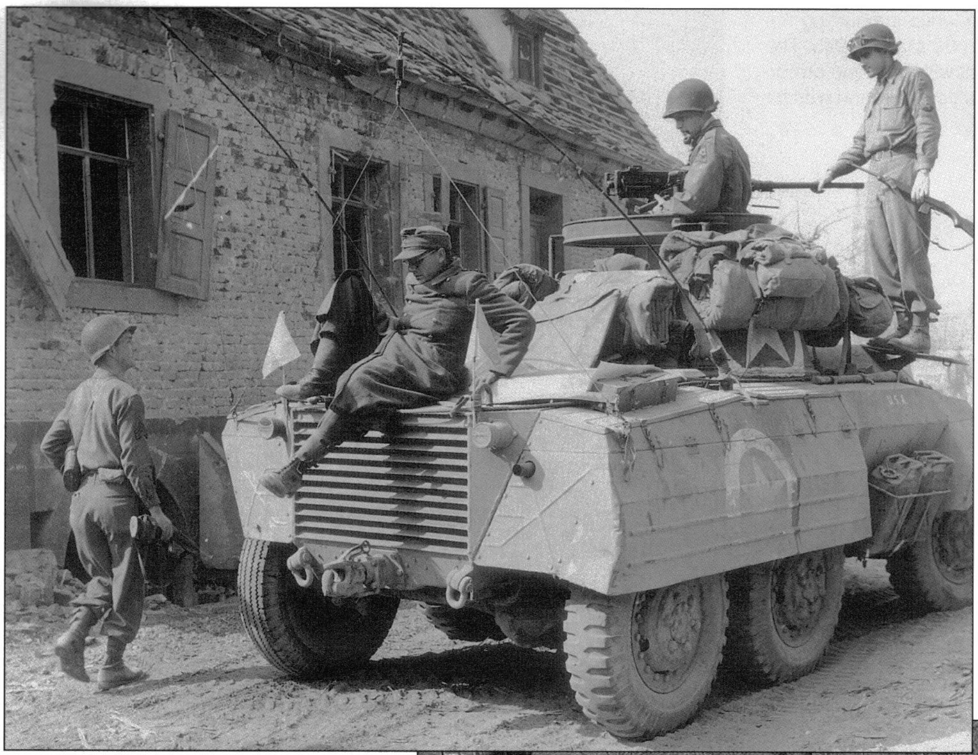




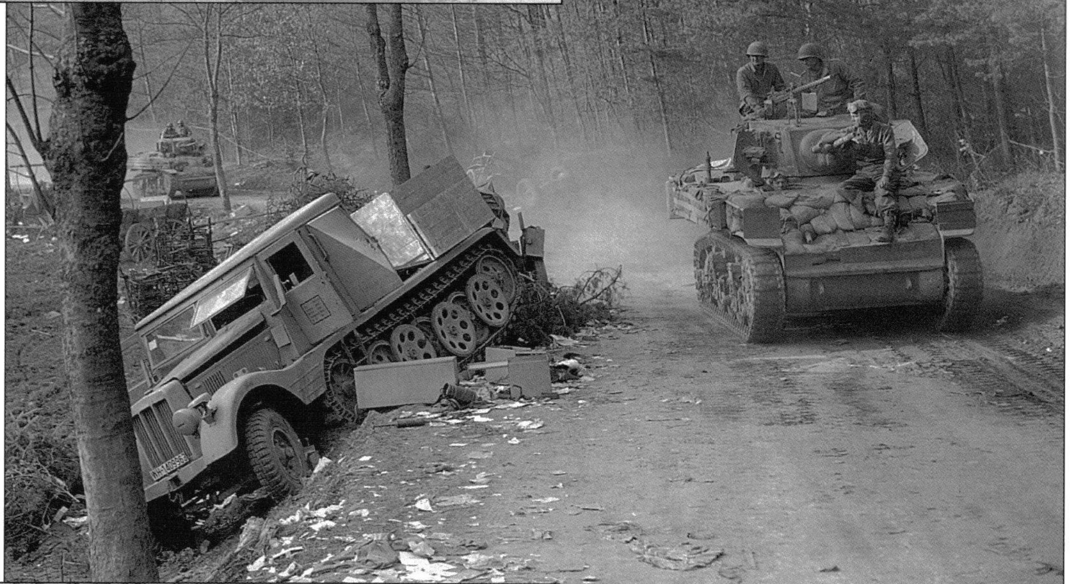
The s.Pz.Jg.Abt.653 abandoned two of its massive Jagdtiger tank destroyers after they were damaged in fighting with the 10th Armored Division near Neustadt an der Weinstrasse and they were photographed by US Signal Corps cameramen on 21 March 1945. The vehicle on the street opposite, tactical number 331, later ended up at Aberdeen Proving Ground. (NARA)



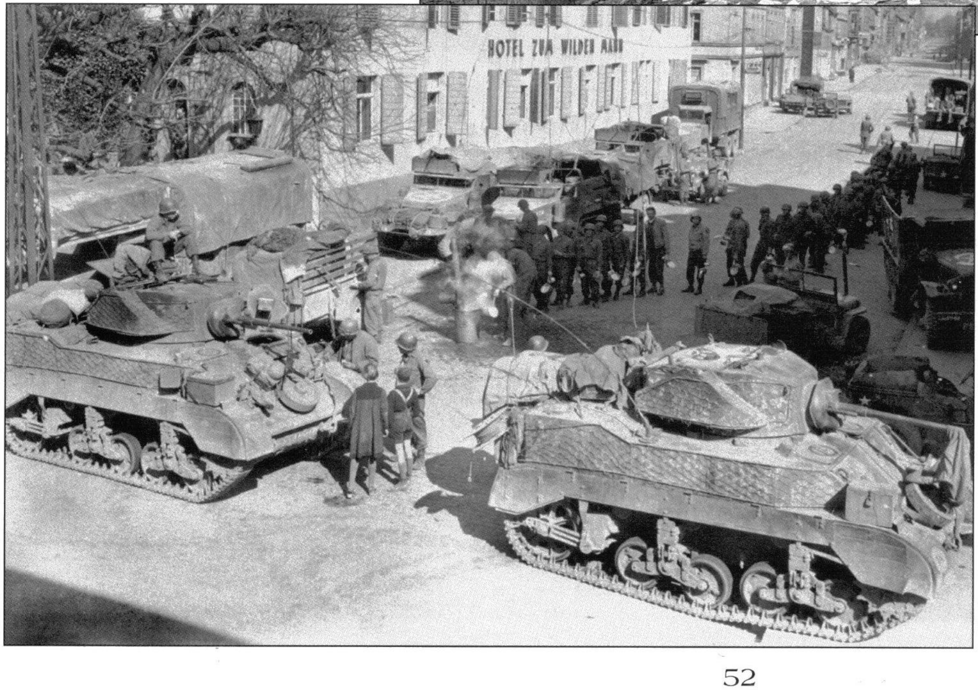
The assistant division commander of the 10th Armored Division roars past Jagdtiger 331 in Neustadt in his armored jeep. This particular vehicle was heavily photographed if for no other reason, its enormous size. (Patton Museum)



A M8 light armored car of the 94th Cavalry Recon Squadron, 14th Armored Division drops off a German prisoner during the fighting around Steinfeld on 23 March 1945. (NARA)

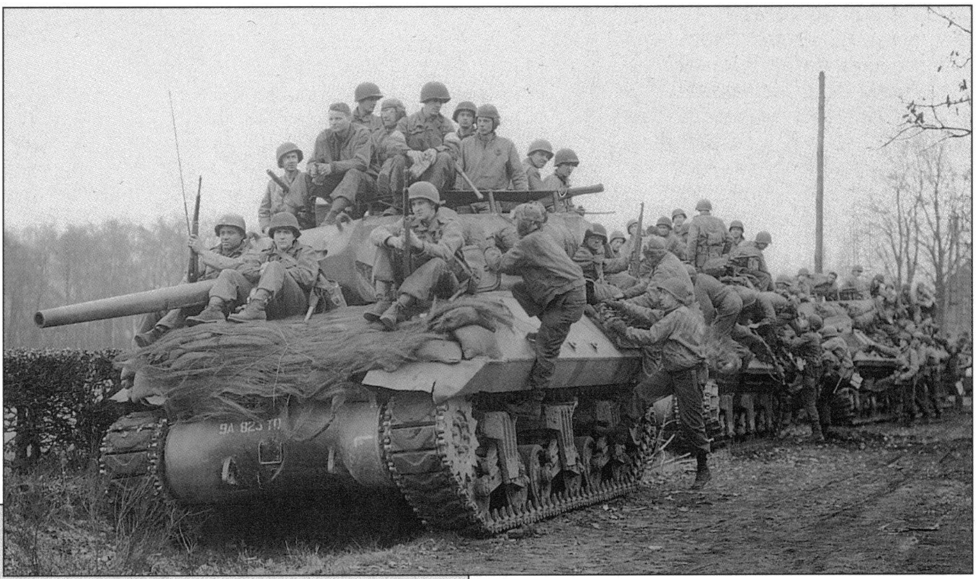


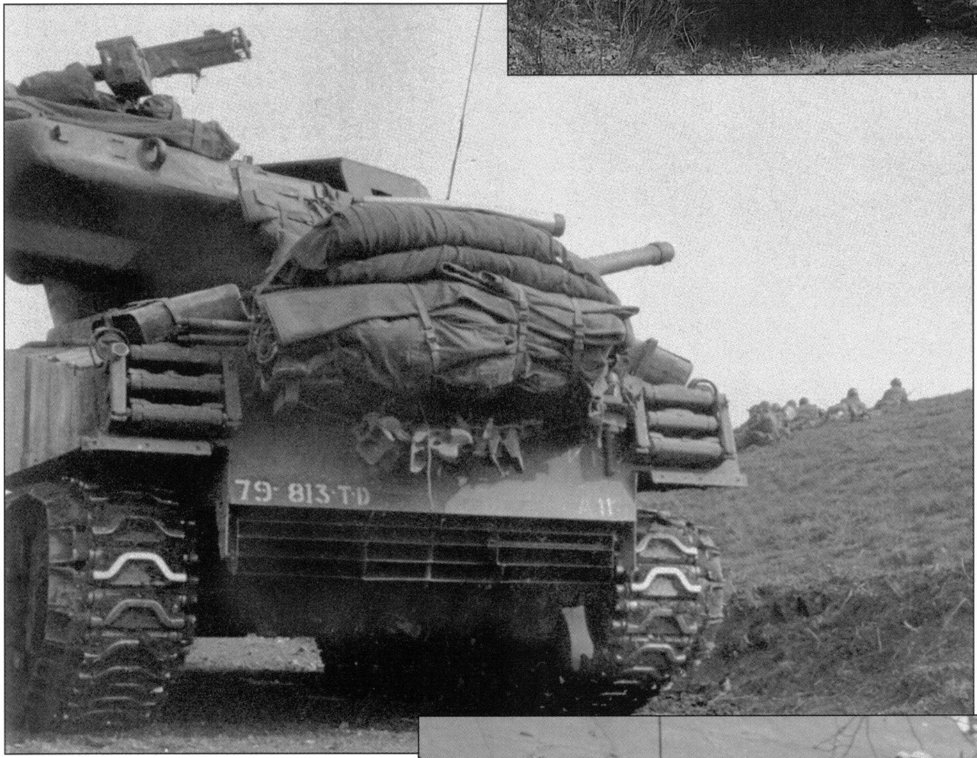
A M5A1 light tank of the 14th Armored Division passes by a wrecked German half-track on the road outside Berg Zabern on 23 March 1945. The crew has added a .30 cal light machine gun to the turret roof in a more convenient position than the usual turret side mounting. (NARA)



The 9th Armored Division had most of its tanks fitted with Sommerfield matting for camouflage when first deployed in the ETO in the autumn of 1944, and some of this was still in place in the spring of 1945 like these M5A1 light tanks in Neuweid on 24 March 1945 while clearing the area between the Rhine and Wied rivers. (USMA)

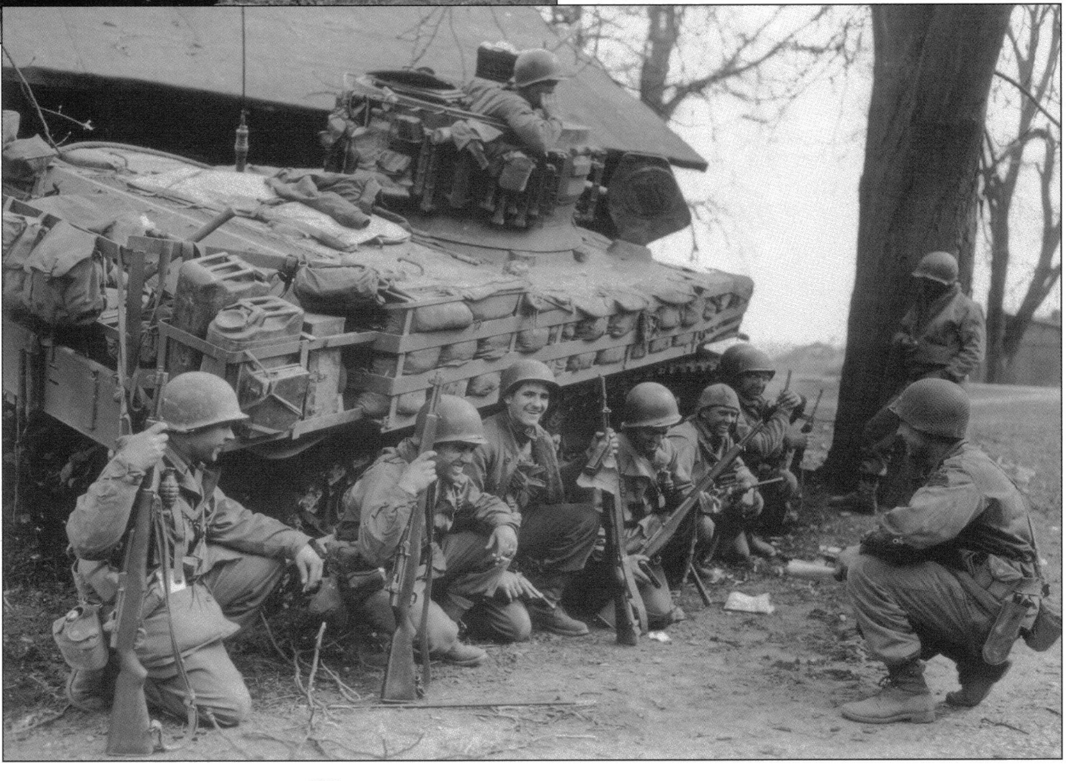
Infantry from the 30th Infantry Division, mount up on M10 3-inch GMC of the 823rd Tank Destroyer Battalion during preparations for crossing the Rhine river in the Ninth Army sector on 24 March 1945. The main push over the Rhine began the following day. (NARA)

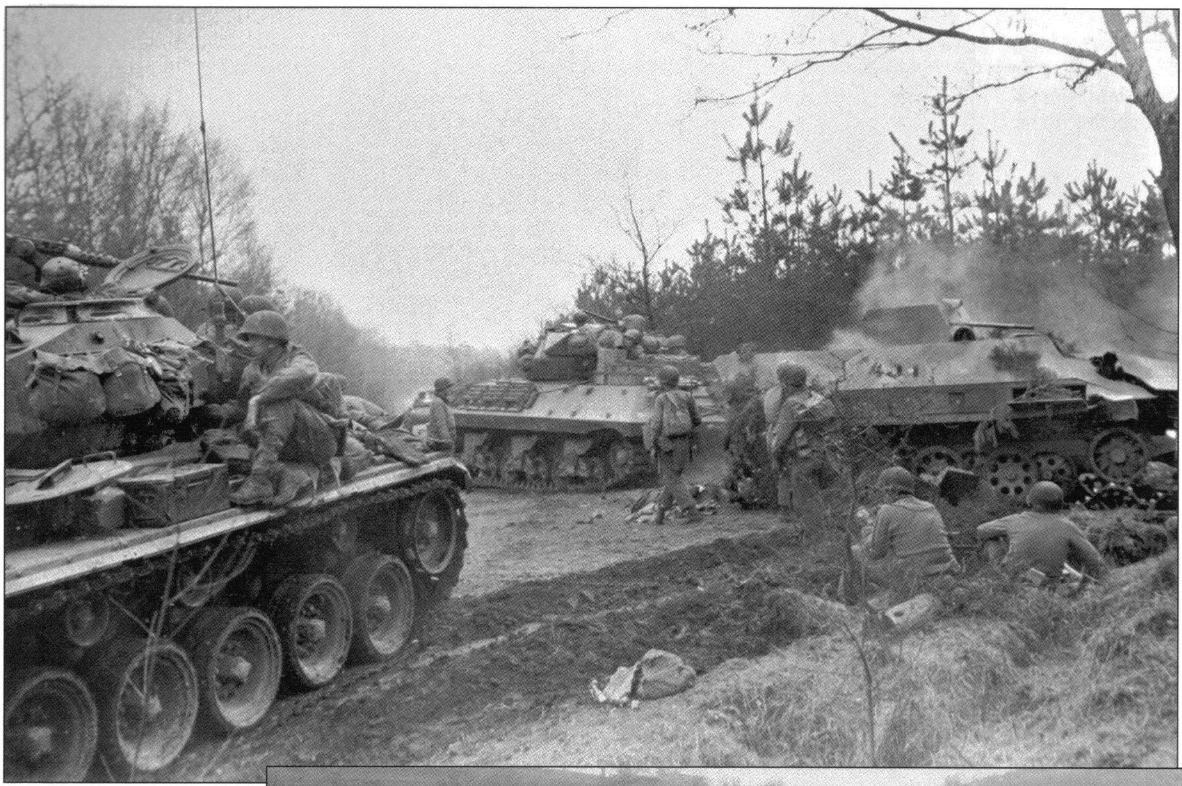




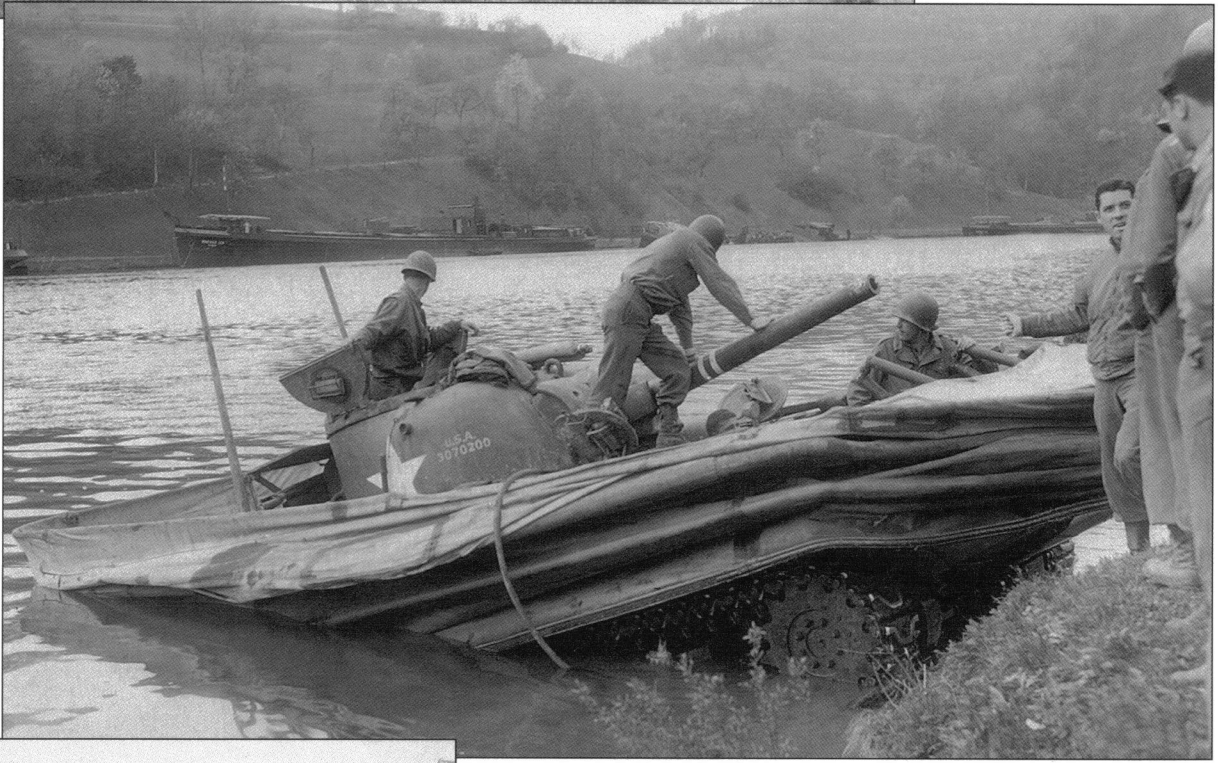
A M36B1 of Co. A, 813th Tank Destroyer Battalion provides fire support for the 79th Division near Dinslaken along the Rhine river on 24 March 1945. This was the least common version of the M36 tank destroyer in the ETO, being based on the M4A3 hull instead of the usual M10A1 hull. This particular vehicle has an armored cover around the turret opening. (USMA)

Infantry wait near a heavily sandbagged M5 light tank of the 47th Tank Battalion, 14th Armored Division during operations near Germersheim on 25 March 1945. This is an unusual example of an old M5 with the small turret still in use in the ETO which were far less common than the normal M5A1 light tanks. (NARA)

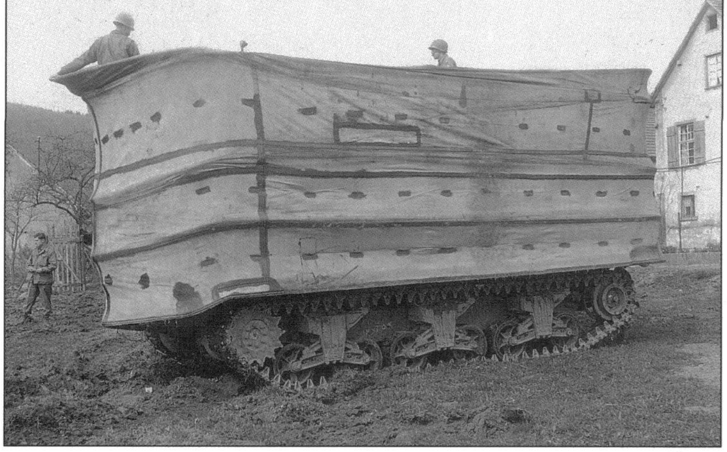




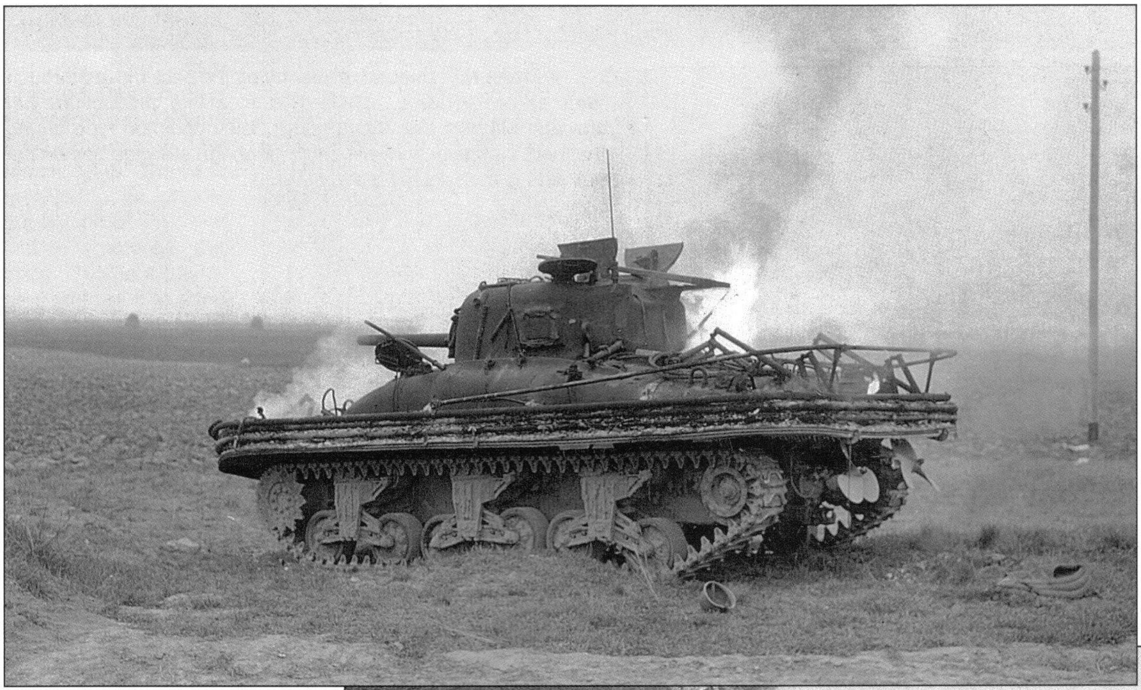
Task Force Hunt, consisting of the 744th Light Tank Battalion, the 2/120th Infantry (30th Division), and two companies of the 823rd Tank Destroyer Battalion attacked towards Kirchhellen at 1600 on 25 March, running into Pz.Gren.Regt.60, 116.Panzer-Division. In the ensuing fight, four Sd.Kfz.251/21 were knocked out including the one seen here to the right, with tactical number 451. The 744th Tank Battalion was unusual in that it was one of the few separate tank battalions in the ETO equipped solely with light tanks, in this case with the new M24 light tank. The battalion had 51 M24 light tanks on hand on 25 March 1945. (USMA)



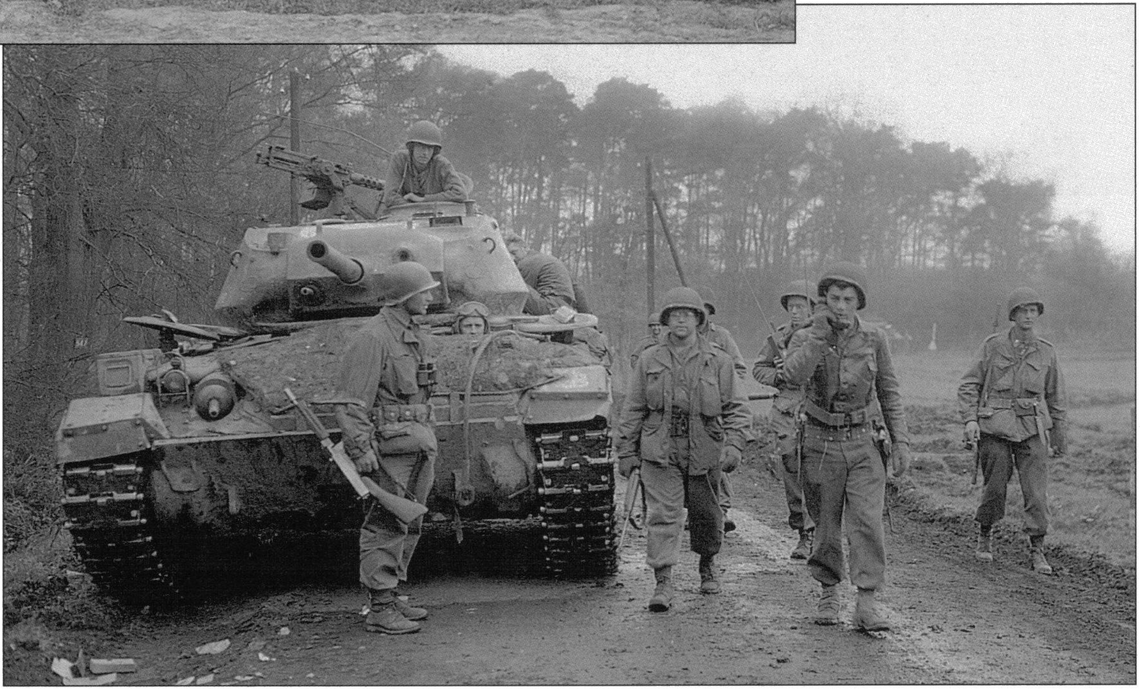
Following their use at Normandy in June 1944, the US Army still had about a hundred M4A1 Duplex Drive amphibious tanks in the ETO which were refurbished for the Rhine crossing operation in late March 1944. This is a training exercise by the 781st Tank Battalion near Binau on the Neckar river on 30 April. This unit was attached to the Seventh Army in southern Germany and so did not participate in the Rhine crossing. It retained its DD tanks for potential future river operations in Germany. (NARA)



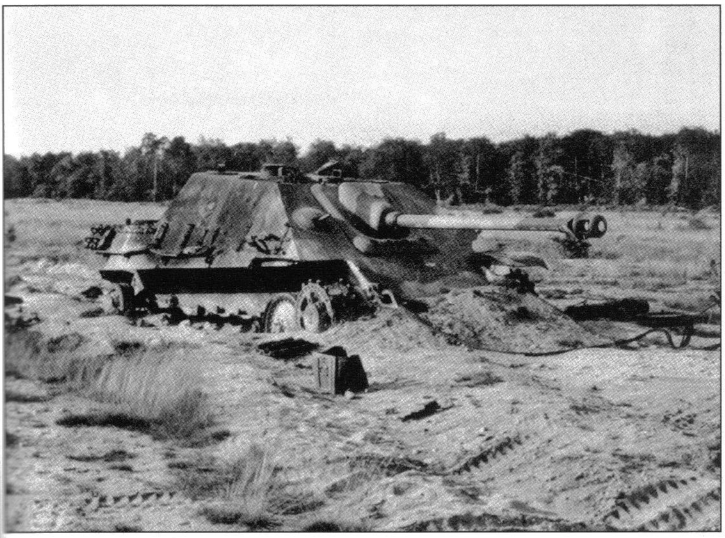
This is an interesting view of a DD tank of the 781st Tank Battalion showing its floatation screen completely erected. The US Army ordered about 350 M4A1 DD tanks which were converted by Firestone from M4A1 tanks. (NARA)



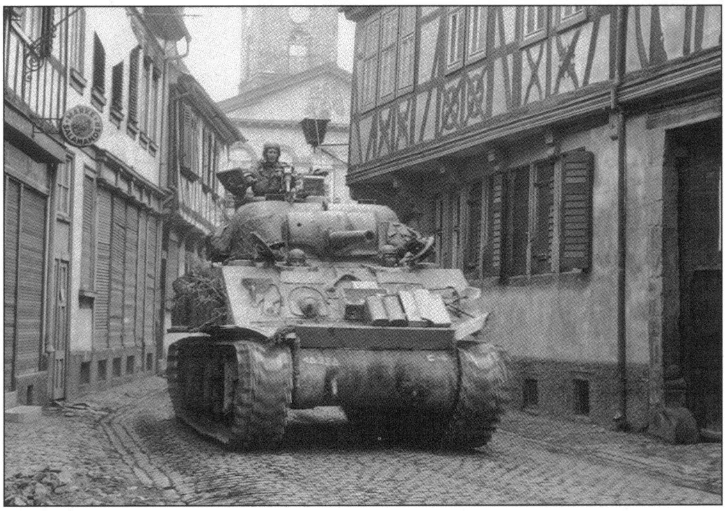
This is a DD tank of Co. C., 736th Tank Battalion that was knocked out in the fighting near Frankenthal on 26 March while supporting the 30th Division. This was one of 17 US DD tanks that crossed the Rhine on 24 March. The 748th Tank Battalion had 51 DD tanks for the operation, but damaged canvas screens limited the use of the tanks in an amphibious mode and only 8 actually swam across the Rhine at the end of March. (NARA)



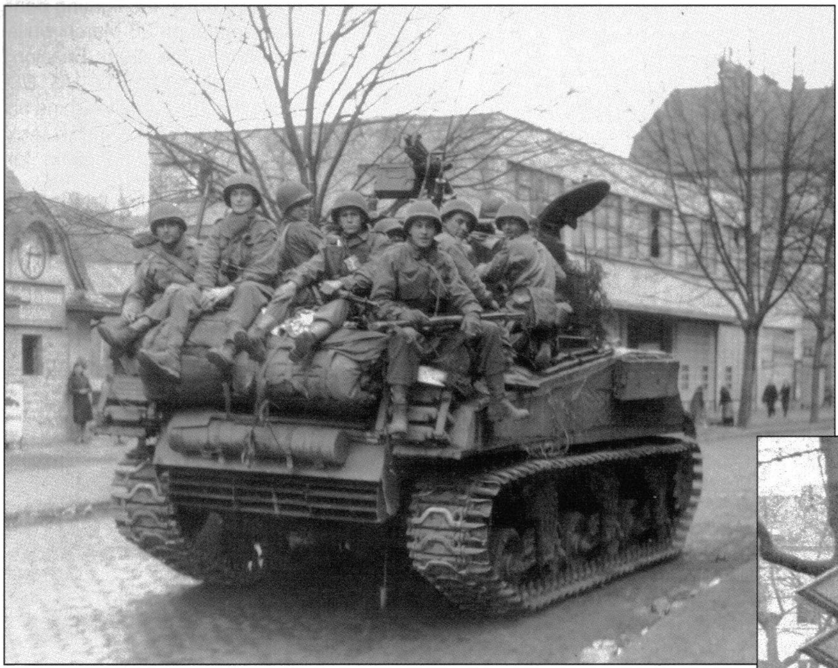
The command element of a rifle platoon of the 120th Infantry, 30th Division advance through the Wesel forest on 26 March 1945 under the watchful eye of a M24 light tank crew from the 744th Light Tank Battalion during their exploitation of the Rhine crossing. (NARA)



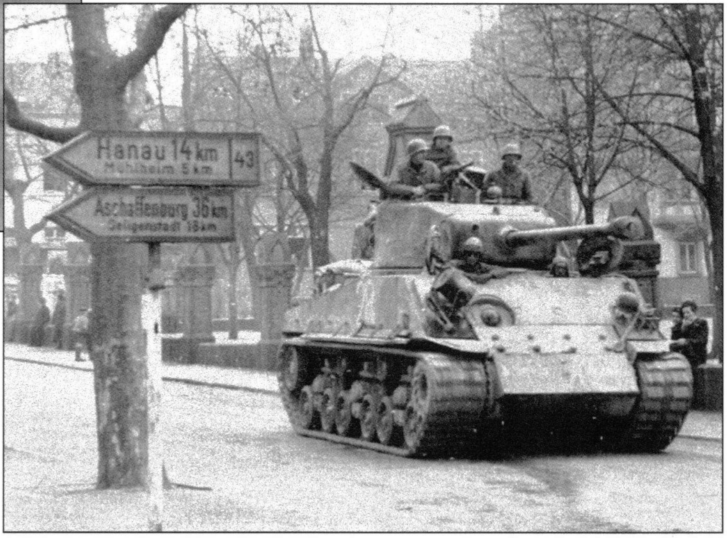
This burned-out Jagdpanther was knocked out in the fighting on the outskirts of Frankfurt in late March 1945, and is seen abandoned some weeks later after attempts to recover it have failed. (MHI)



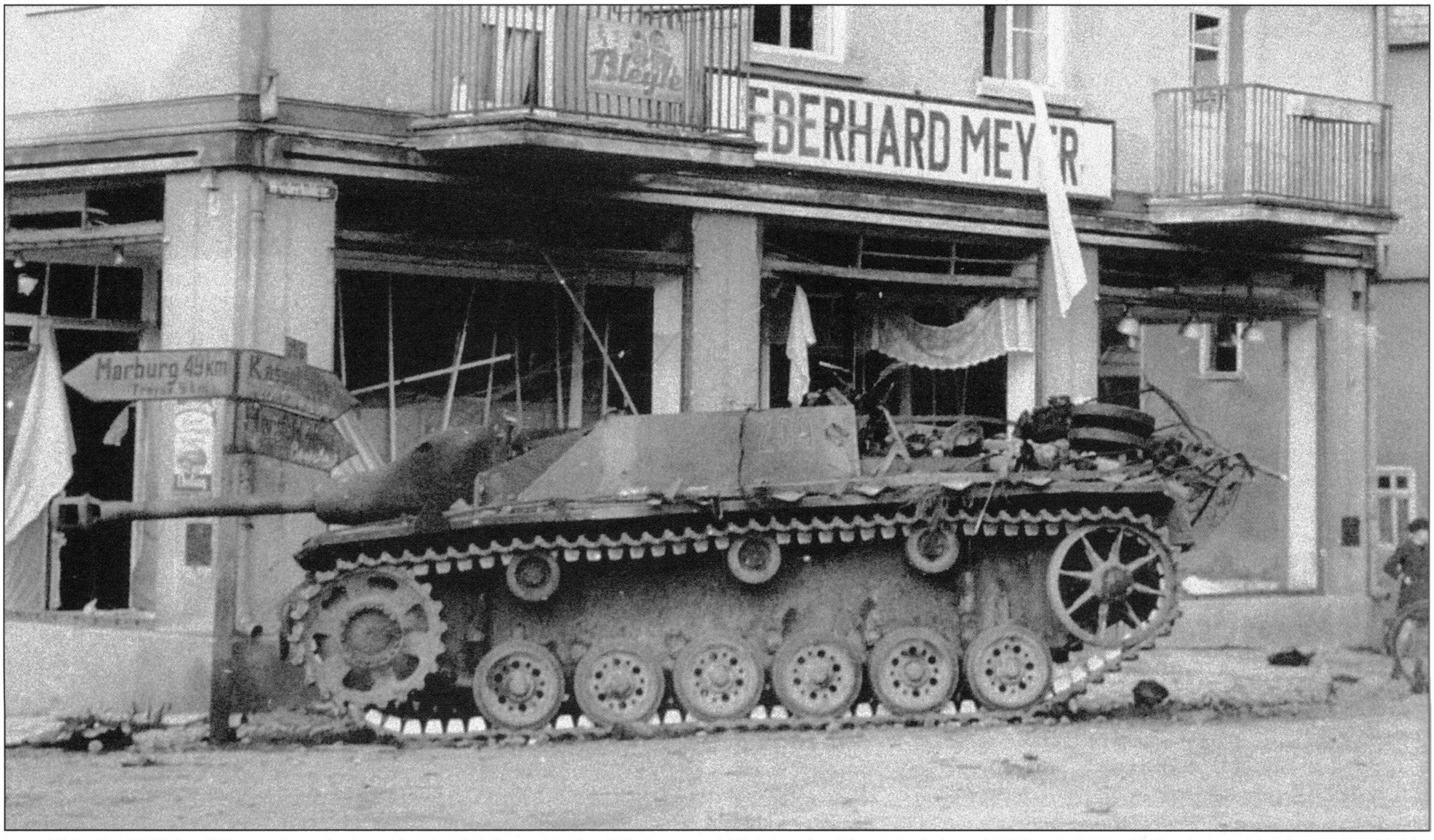
A M4A3 of Co. C, 35th Tank Battalion, 4th Armored Division moving through the outskirts of Frankfurt on 28 March 1945. This appears to be an old M4A3 with direct vision slots that has been rebuilt with appliqué armor and other features. (NARA)



A M4A3 with a squad of infantry on the back moves through Weitzlar on 28 March 1945. This is a late production, wet stowage M4 with the 75mm gun, a fairly common type during the 1945 campaign in Germany, though the stowage box on the hull side is unusual. (NARA)

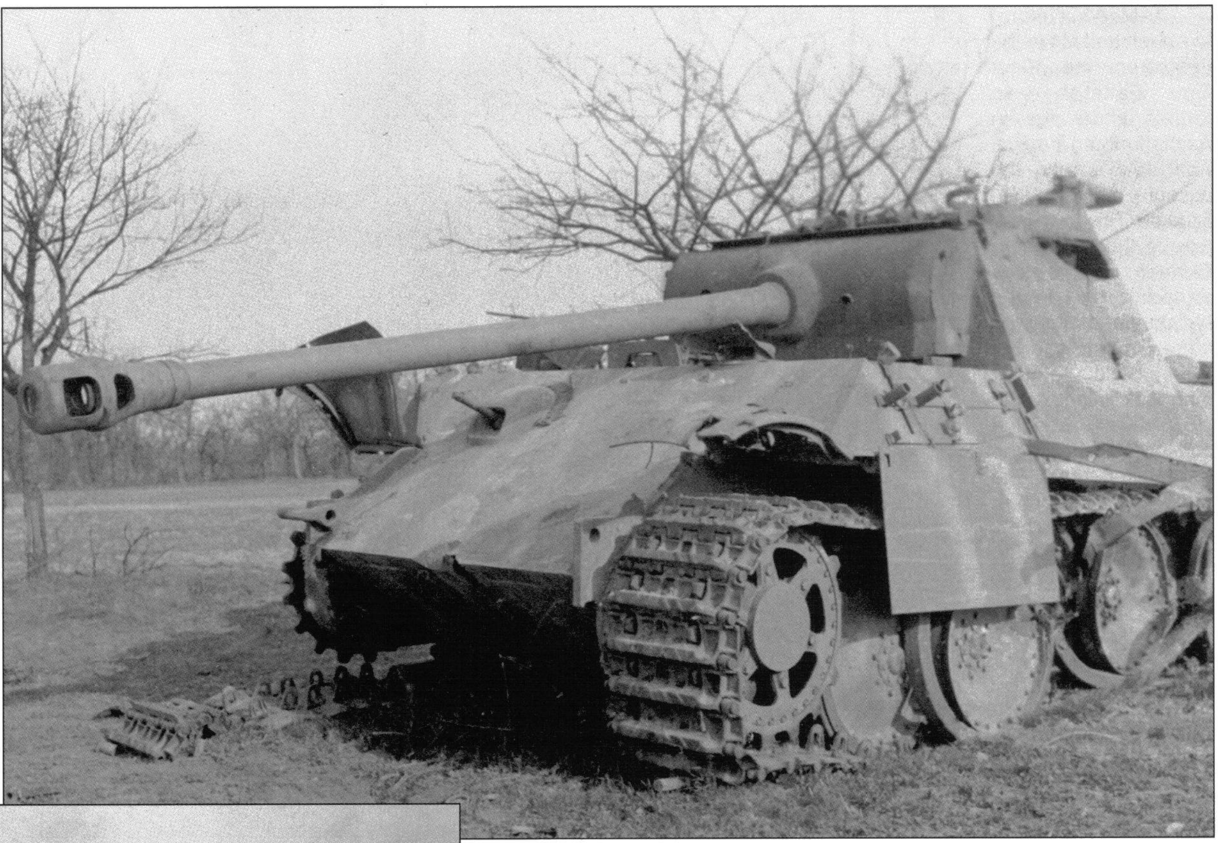

Hanau 14 km
Mühlheim 5 km
43
Aschaffenburg 36 km
Seligenstadt 16 km

A M4A3E8 (76mm) of the 6th Armored Division guards an intersection in Offenbach on 28 March 1945. This particular tank was one of those fitted with appliqué armor on the glacis plate, though not on the turret. It is painted with the large tactical numbers typical of the 6th Armored Division, in this case, number 28. (NARA)


EBERHARD MEYER
Marburg 49 km

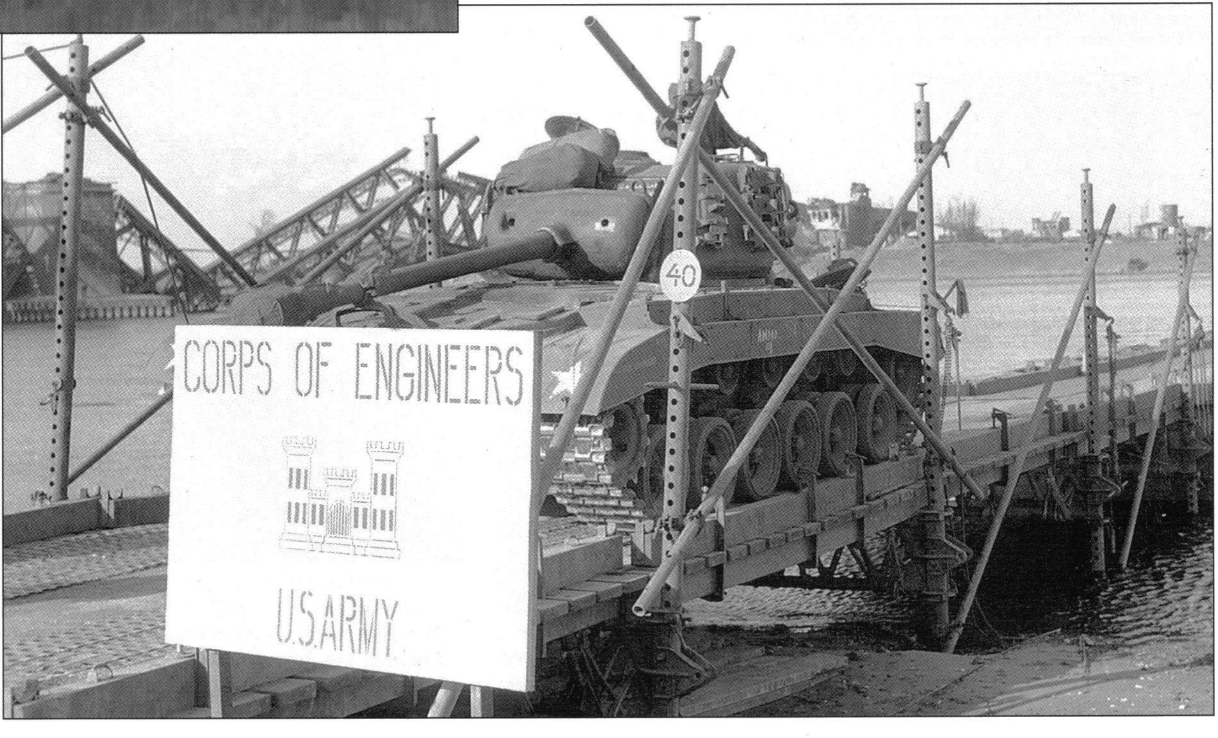
This StuG.III Ausf.G was knocked out in the fighting with the 6th Armored Division for Ziegenhahn on 30 March 1945 during its rapid drive to the Fulda river. (MHI)

This Panther Ausf.G was knocked out by the 14th Armored Division near Germersheim during their advance in late March 1945. The tank received a hit on the upper side of the turret which shattered the armor. This is a brand-new tank as it is fitted with the small oval hooks for attaching camouflage that were only introduced on the production lines in March 1945. (Patton Museum)

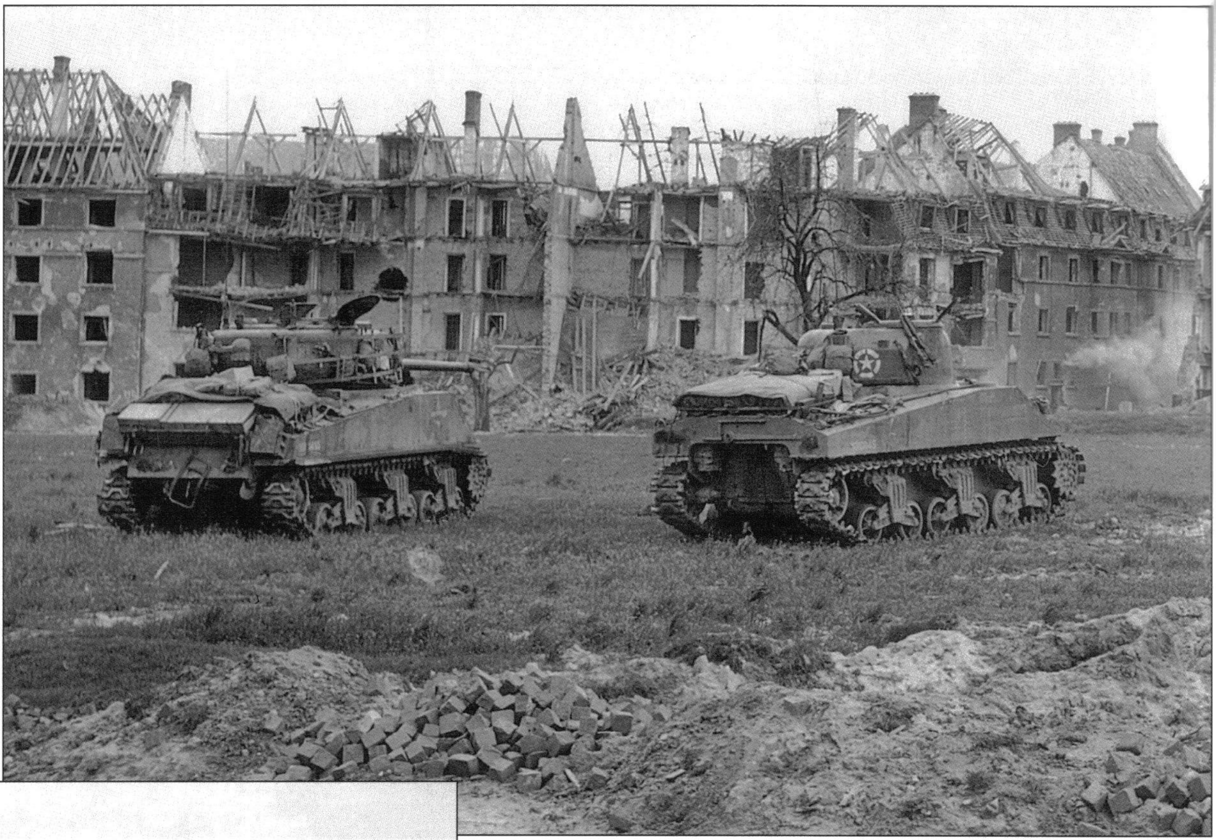


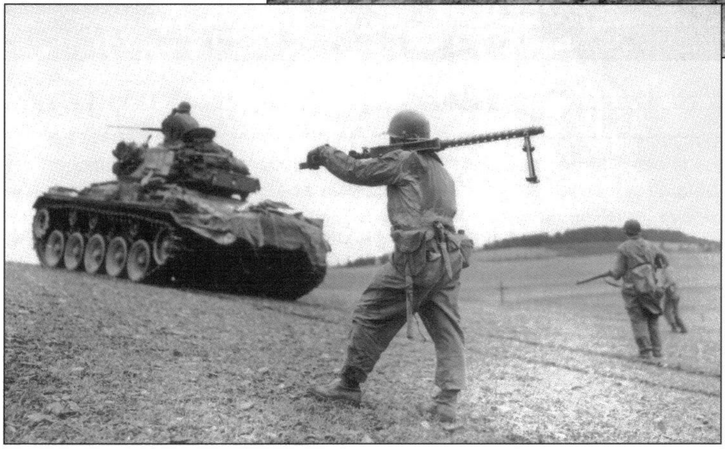
A new T26E3 tank test fires its gun near Kaarst on 29 March 1944. The 2nd Armored Division had about twenty of these new tanks in service by early April. (NARA)

A T26E3 tank from the 3rd Armored Division crosses the Weser river on 30 March 1945. The 3rd and 9th Armored Divisions were the first to obtain shipments of these new tanks, receiving ten each in late February 1945. (NARA)

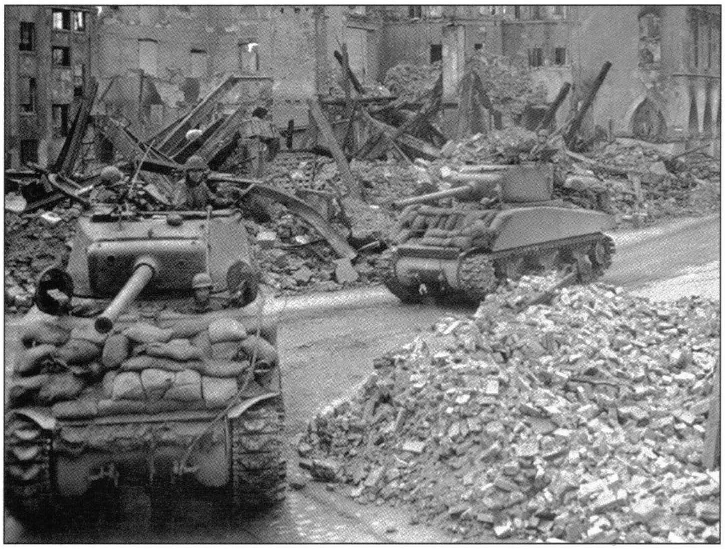


A M4A3 (76mm) to the left and M4 to the right from the 191st Tank Battalion take targets under fire in Aschaffenburg on 2 April 1945 during the assault by the 45th Division. This town was one of the few where German civilians took an active part in the resistance along with large numbers of Hitlerjugend. Rather than risk infantry, the US divisional commander shelled the town with tank and artillery fire until it finally surrendered on 3 April 1945. (NARA)

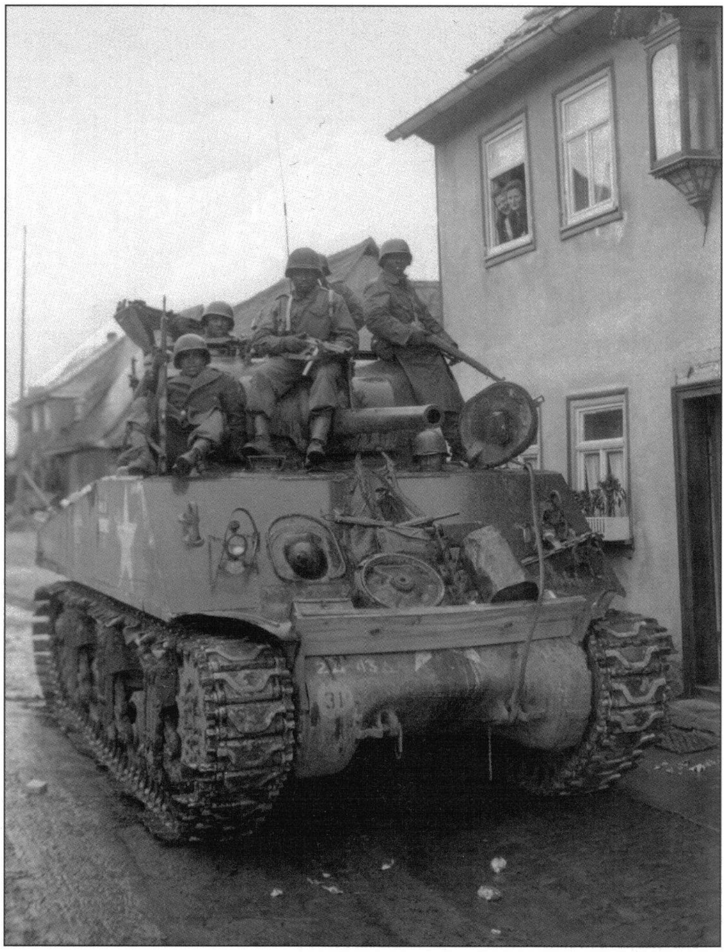




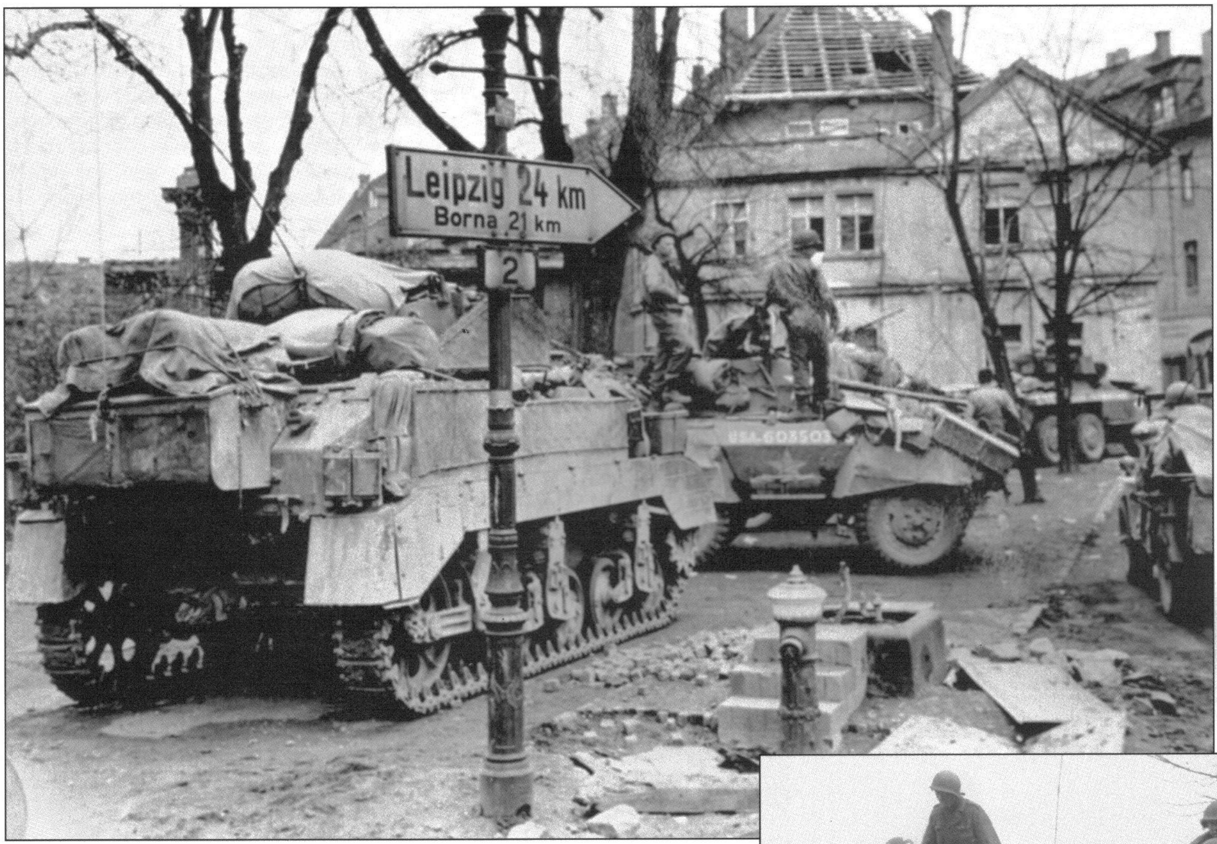
A machine gunner armed with a Browning M1909A6 .30 cal light machine gun advances behind one of the new M24 light tanks during the 1st Infantry Division's advance near Scharfenberg on 2 April 1945. (NARA)



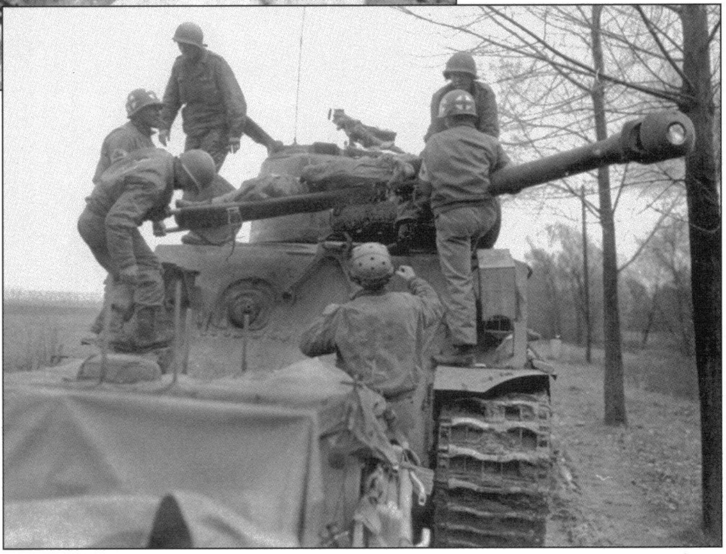
A pair of heavily sand-bagged M4A3 (76mm) tanks of the 771st Tank Battalion pass through the ruins of Muenster on 3 April while supporting the 17th Airborne Division which had first entered the city the pervious day during the offensive over the Rhine. (NARA)



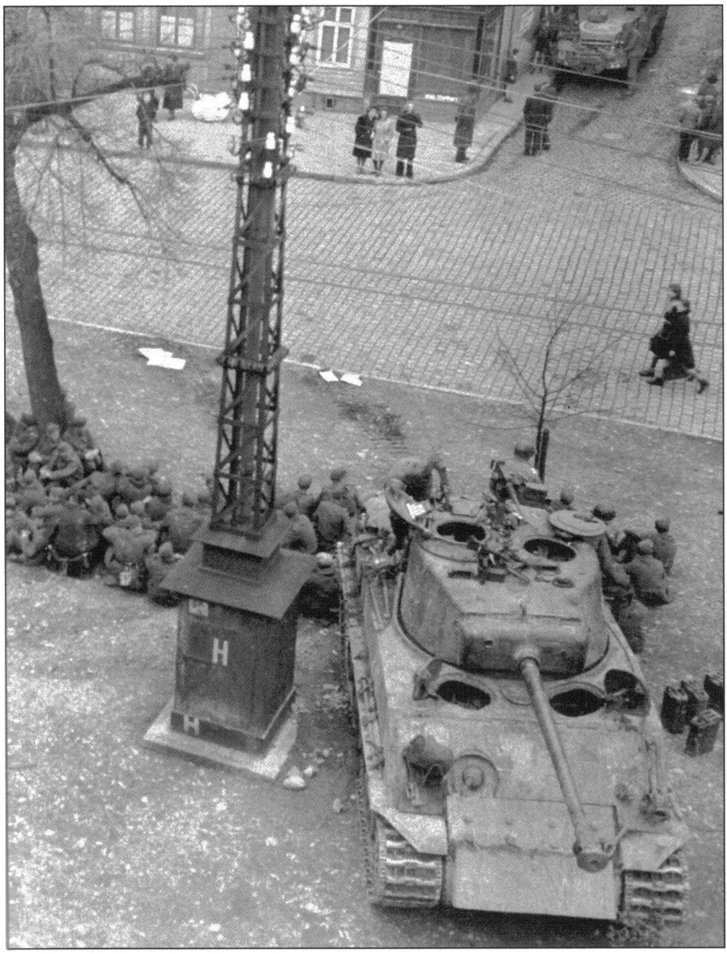
A M4A3 of the 43rd Tank Battalion, 12th Armored Division advances through Schneeberg on 3 April carrying GIs from the 66th Infantry. The US Army changed its segregation policy about blacks in the infantry in February 1945 after the Battle of the Bulge, and black volunteers served in a number of infantry divisions during the final months of the campaign as seen here. (NARA)



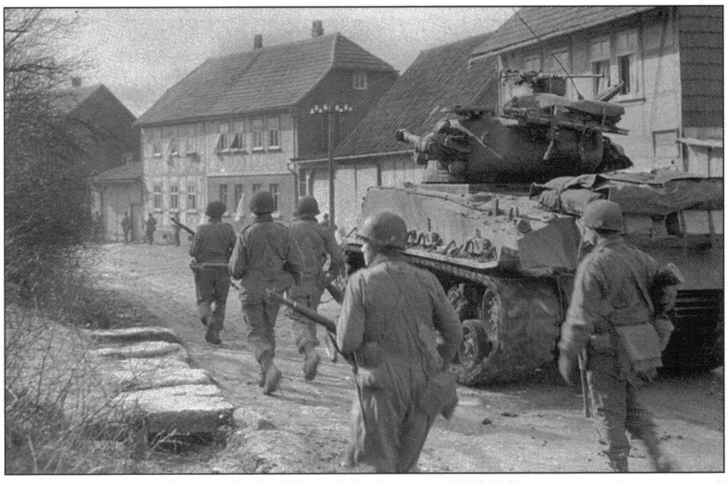
The cavalry recon squadron of the 9th Armored Division occupies the town square in Pegau on 4 April 1945 while defending a bridgehead over the Diemel river. To the left is a late production M5A1 light tank with Sommerfield matting while in the center are M8 light armored cars. (USMA)



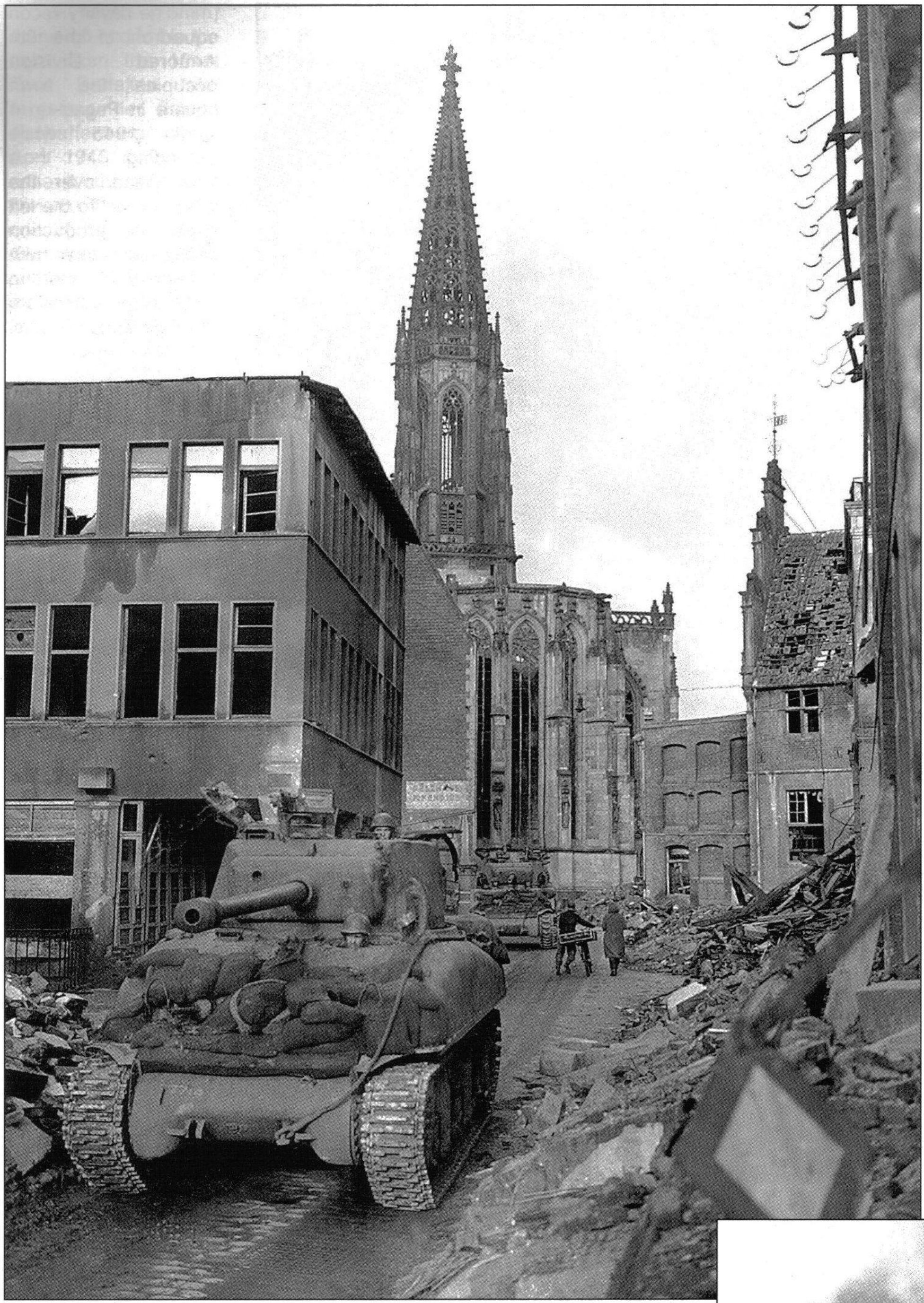
Medics evacuate a wounded crewman from a damaged M4A3E8 (76mm) tank of the 6th Armored Division during fighting near Oberdola on 4 April 1945. (MHI)



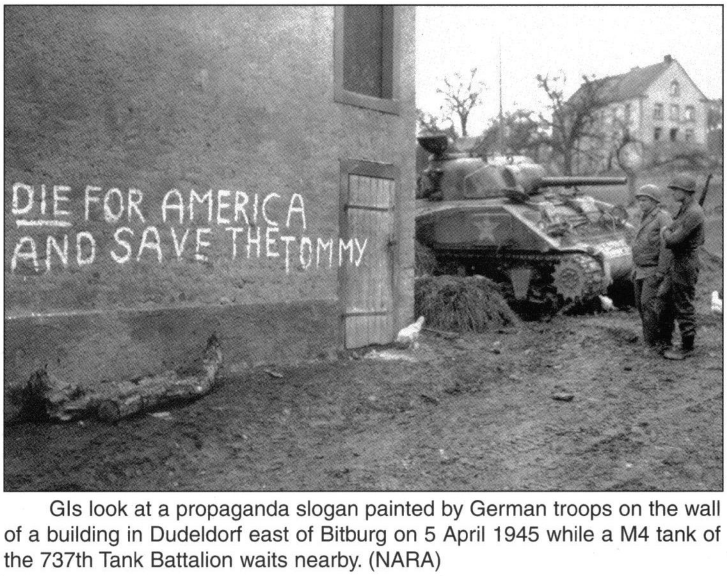
An interesting overhead view inside the city of Muhlhausen on 5 April 1945, the day after its capture by the 6th Armored Division. A M4A3E8 (76mm) is standing guard over a number of German prisoners. It is fitted with appliqué armor over the glacis plate, a standard arrangement in Patton's Third Army. The turret mounted .50 cal heavy machine gun has been supplemented by an additional .30 cal light machine gun. (MHI)



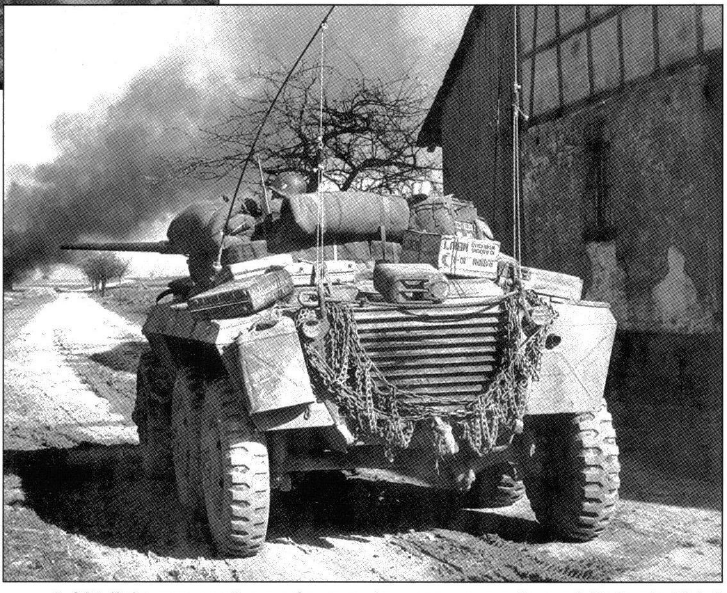
A M4A3E8 (76mm) of TF44, 6th Armored Division, supports armored doughs of the 44th Armored Infantry Battalion during their advance into Oberdola on 4 April, part of a larger divisional operation to encircle the city of Muhlhausen. (MHI)



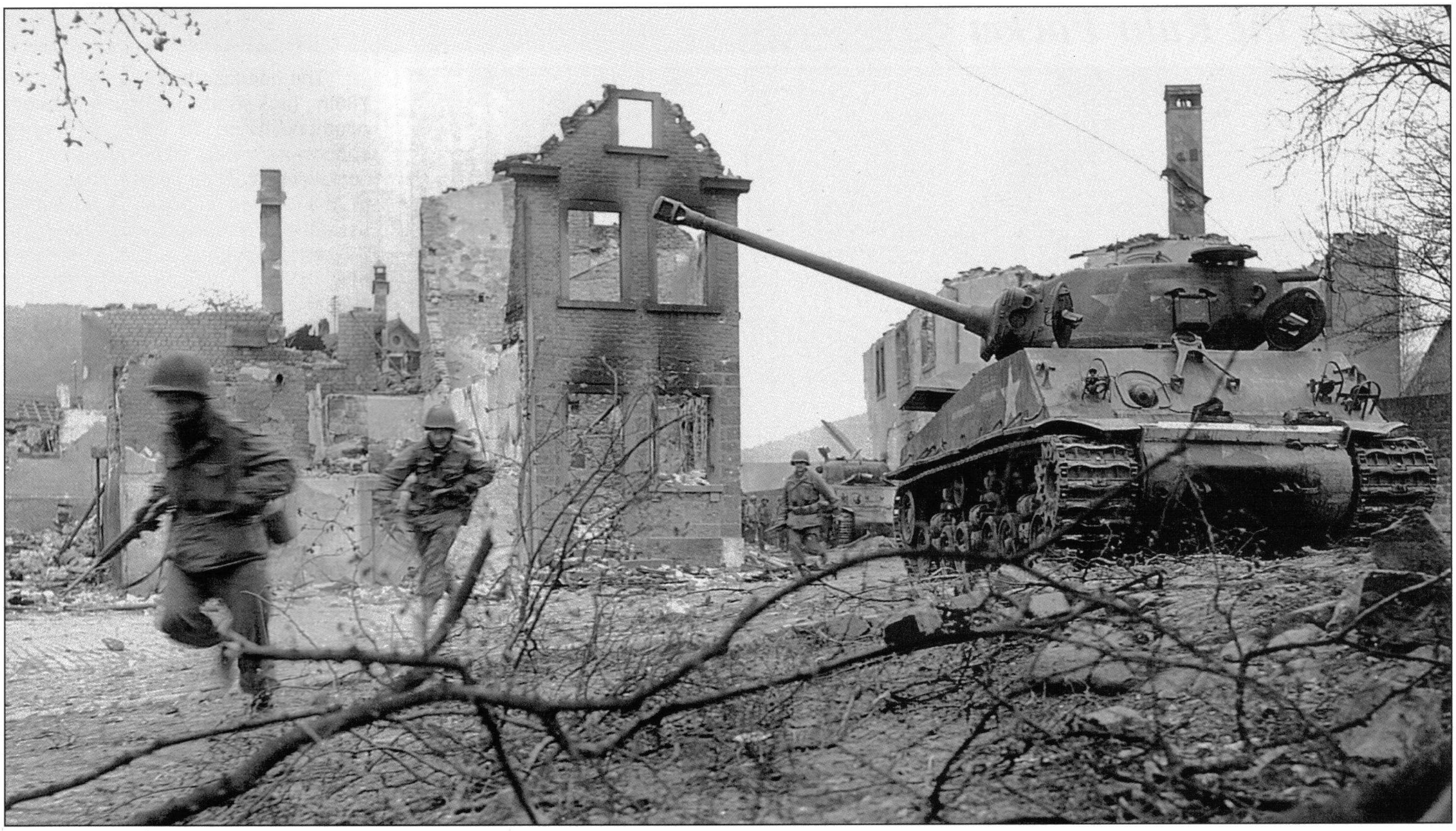
A M4A1 (76mm) of the 771st Tank Battalion moving through the ruins of Muenster on 5 April 1945 while supporting the 17th Airborne Division. This is one of the newer production types that appeared in the spring of 1945, and differed from the M4A1 (76mm) deployed in Normandy in having a muzzle brake on the gun, the newer turret with oval loader's hatch, and the cover over the hull air intake. (NARA)



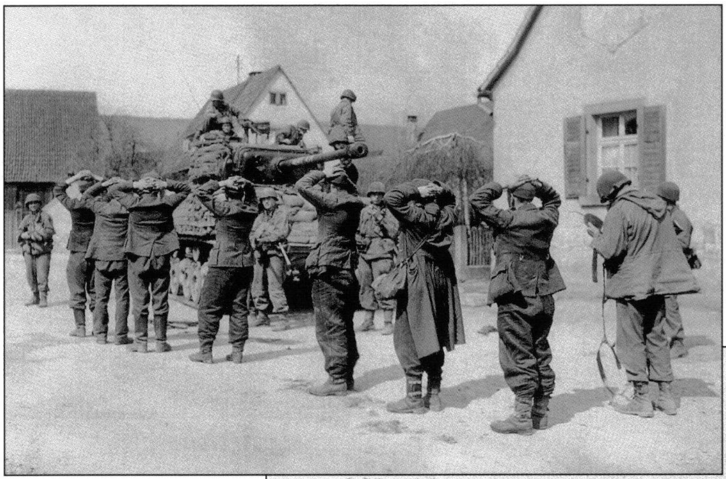
GIs look at a propaganda slogan painted by German troops on the wall of a building in Dudeldorf east of Bitburg on 5 April 1945 while a M4 tank of the 737th Tank Battalion waits nearby. (NARA)



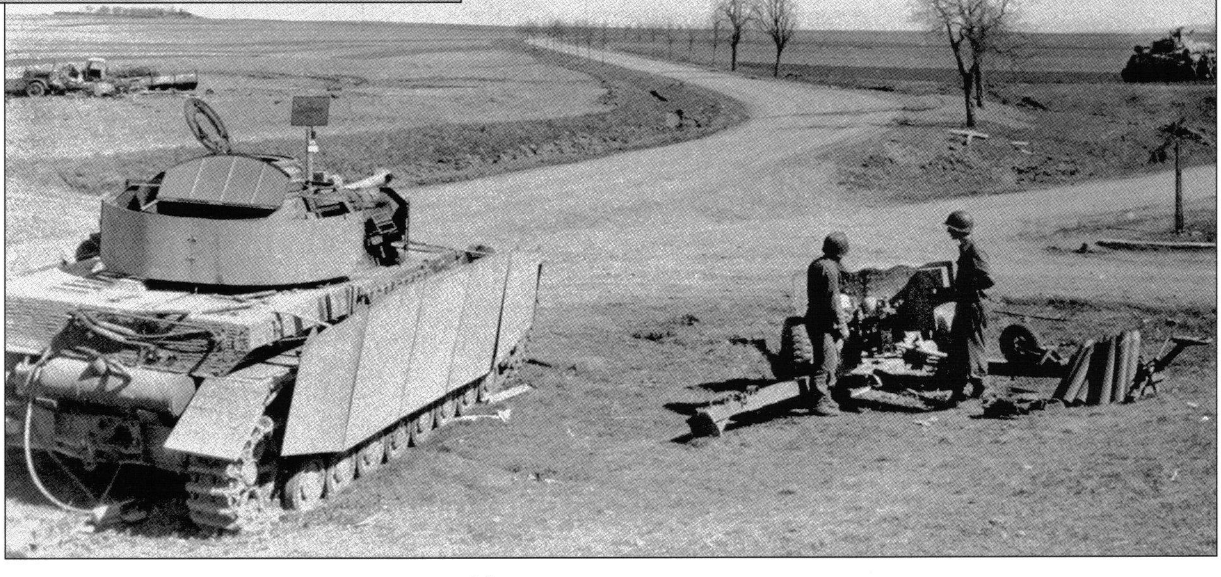
A M8 light armored car of a cavalry recon squadron of Patton's Third Army is on patrol outside of Wellersen on 4 April 1945. Not trusting the weather, the crew is still carrying snow chains on the rear engine deck. (NARA)



Armored doughs of the 14th Armored Division move past a M4A3E8 (76mm) during the fighting near Gemeuenden on 5 April 1945. Although the 14th Armored Division had fitted most of its tanks with an elaborate set of sandbags in February-March 1945, there was neither the time nor equipment to upgrade new replacements such as this one. (NARA)

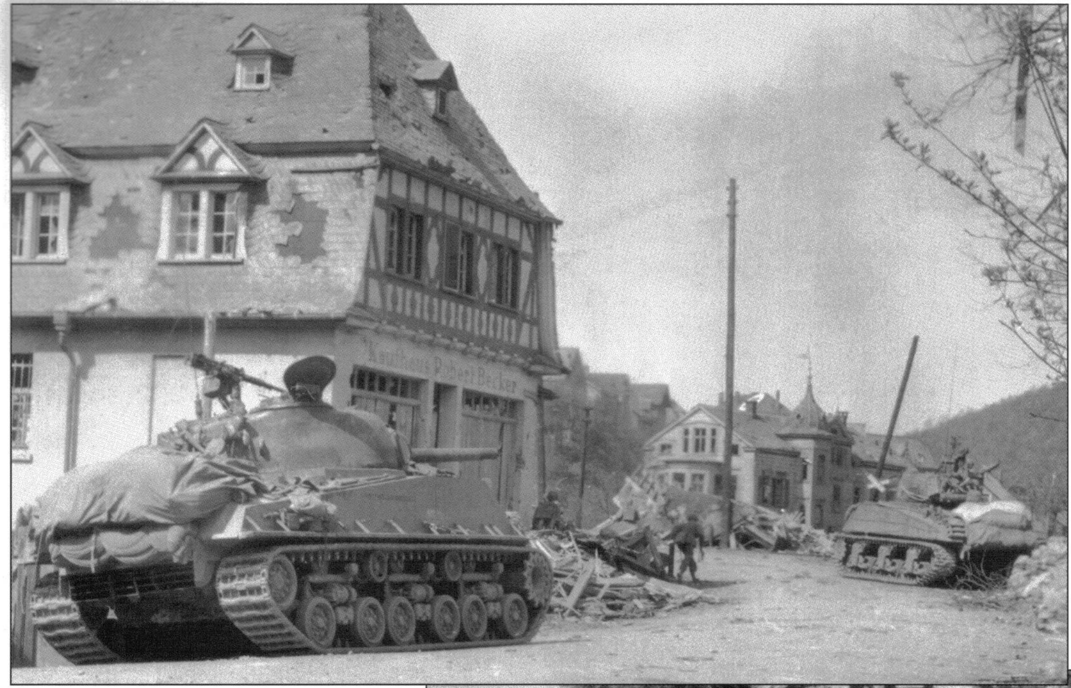


German prisoners are rounded up in Hesselbach on 8 April 1945 while the crew of a M4A3E8 (76mm) of the 14th Armored Division looks on. It is fitted with the usual appliqué of sand-bags. (NARA)

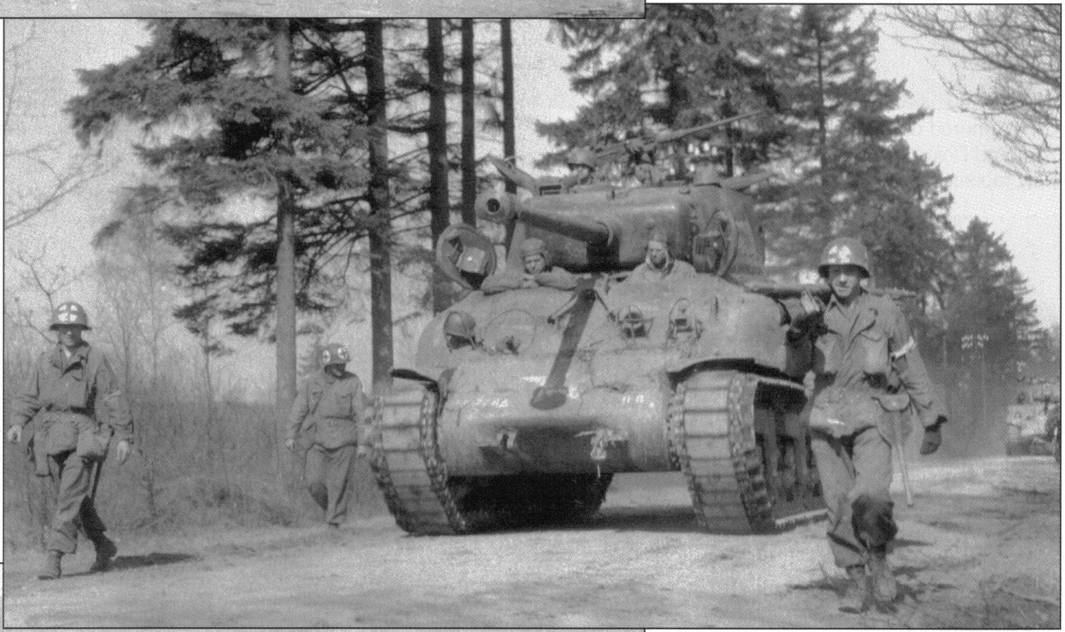


A 57mm anti-tank gun of an armored infantry battalion of the CCB/6th Armored Division takes up positions at a crossroads outside Mulhausen on 8 April 1945 near an abandoned Pz.Kpfw.IV. The Pz.Kpfw.IV is a bit unusual in that it is still fitted with a full set of hull skirts which were often left off by the crews to ease maintenance. (MHI)

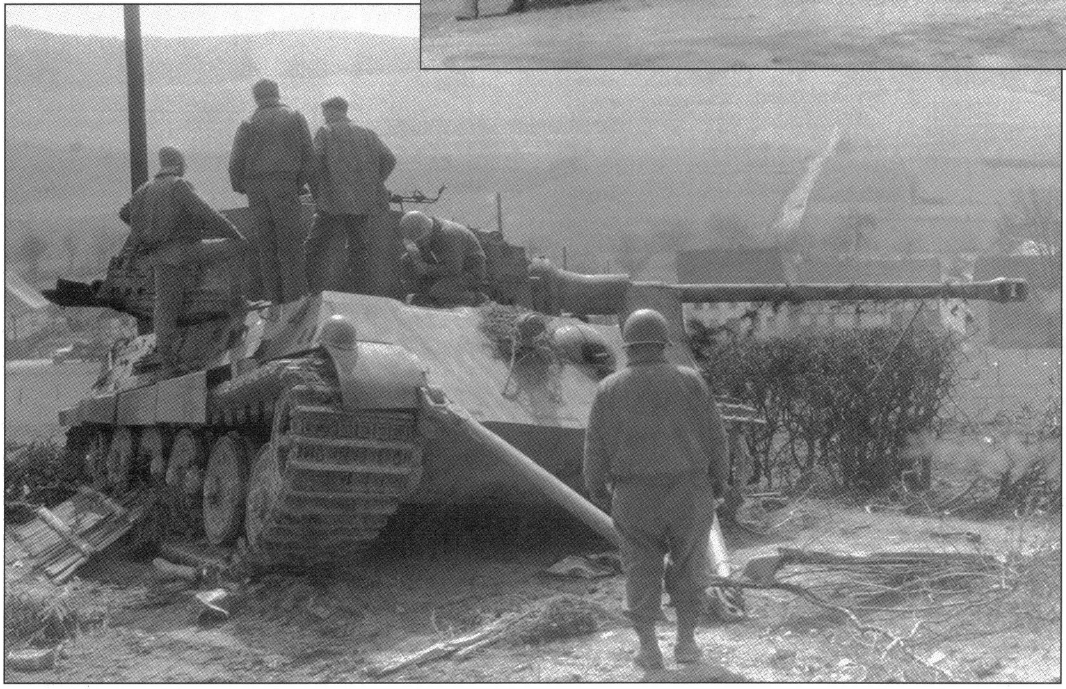
Sealing the Ruhr Pocket



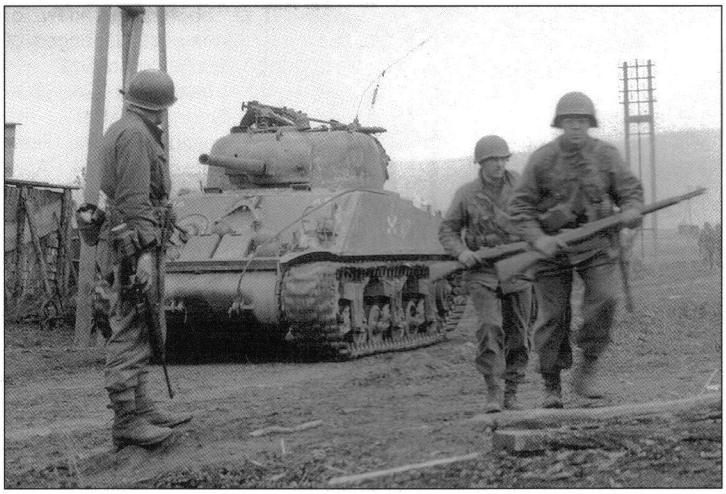
The headquarters company of the 786th Tank Battalion move through Alterhundem on 10 April 1945 while supporting the 99th Division in containing the Ruhr pocket. The vehicle to the left is a M4A3E8 (105mm) assault gun, a relatively rare type in the ETO as few of the assault tanks with the new HVSS suspension arrived in theater before the end of the war. This particular tank battalion was deployed in combat in late January 1945, which probably accounts for such new equipment. (NARA)



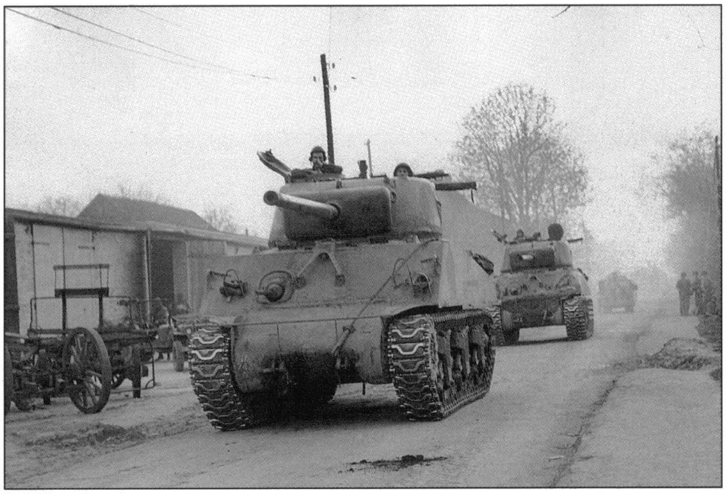
A M4A1 (76mm) provides support for the 78th Division near Honsborn on 10 April 1945 during the operations to reduce the Ruhr pocket. Aside from a few hundred M4A1 (76mm) issued in July 1944, this version of the Sherman tank was not widely used by the US Army. In the last few months of the war, some later production M4A1 (76mm) began appearing, which can be distinguished by the muzzle brake on the gun and other features. (NARA)



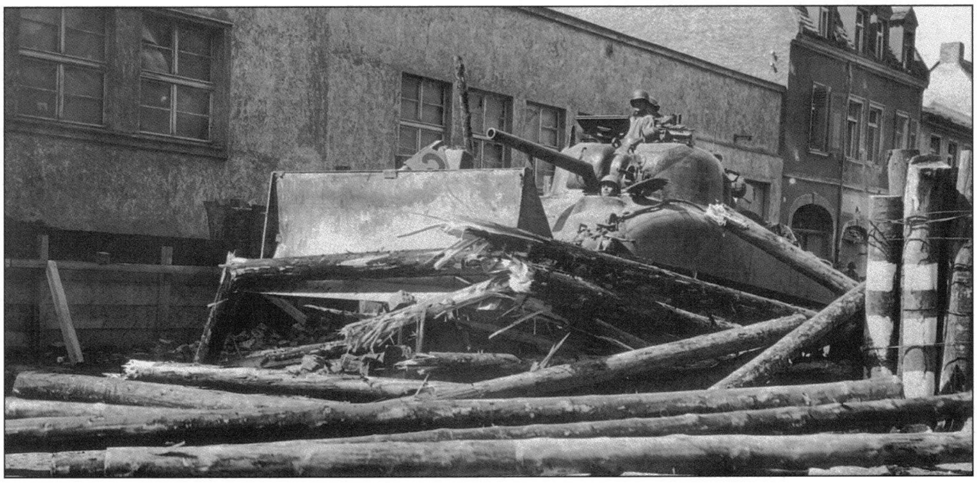
This Kingtiger was captured by Combat Command R, 7th Armored Division near Mahmecke on 11 April 1945 during the final stages of the battle for the Ruhr pocket. This may have been one of the Kingtigers from the training school at the nearby Sennelager supporting the SS Ersatzbrigade Westfalen in the fighting near Paderborn. (NARA)



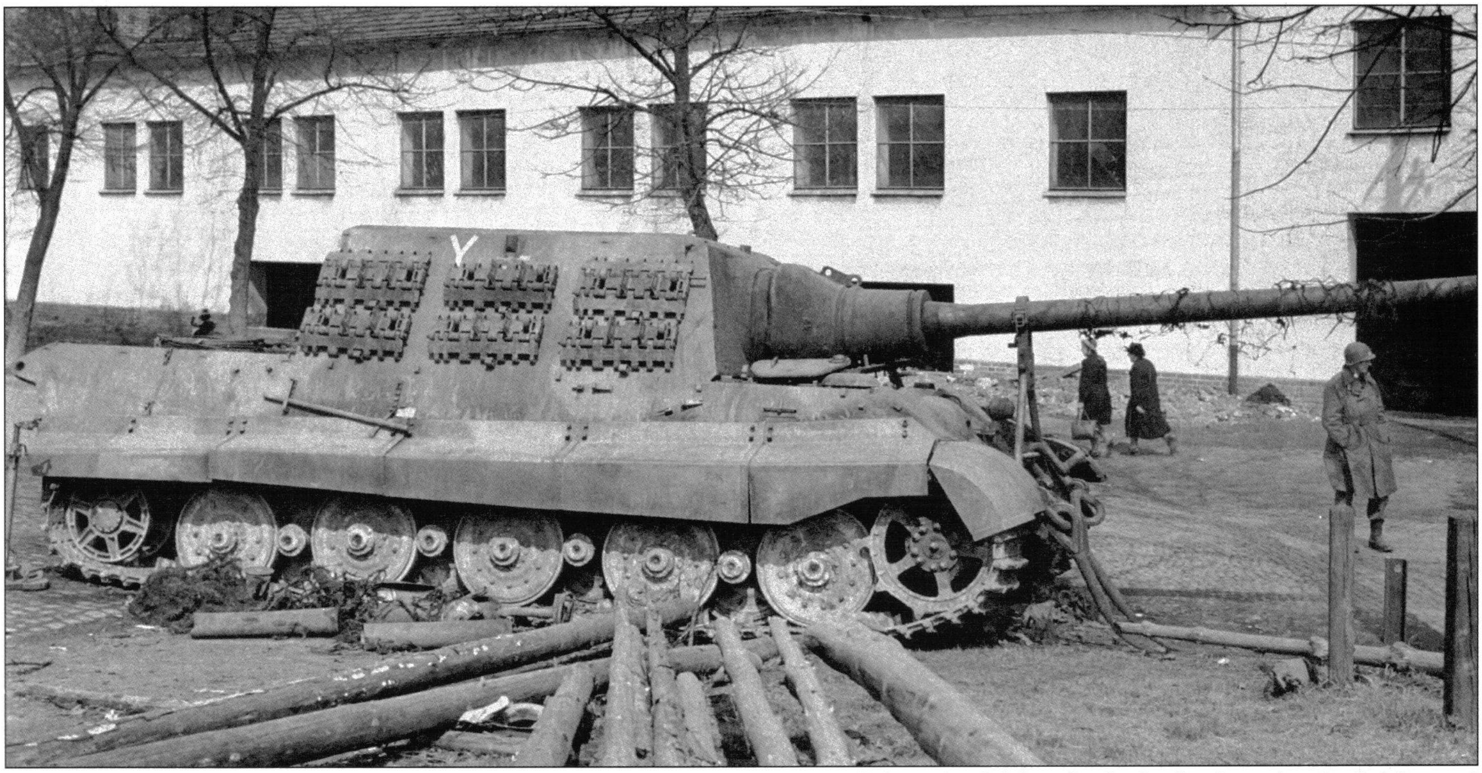
Armored doughs of the 12th Armored Division advance with tank support in Krautostheim on 11 April 1945. The M4A3 is from Co. A, 714th Tank Battalion, and carries the unique chevron style of markings adopted by the 12th Armored Division late in the war. (NARA)



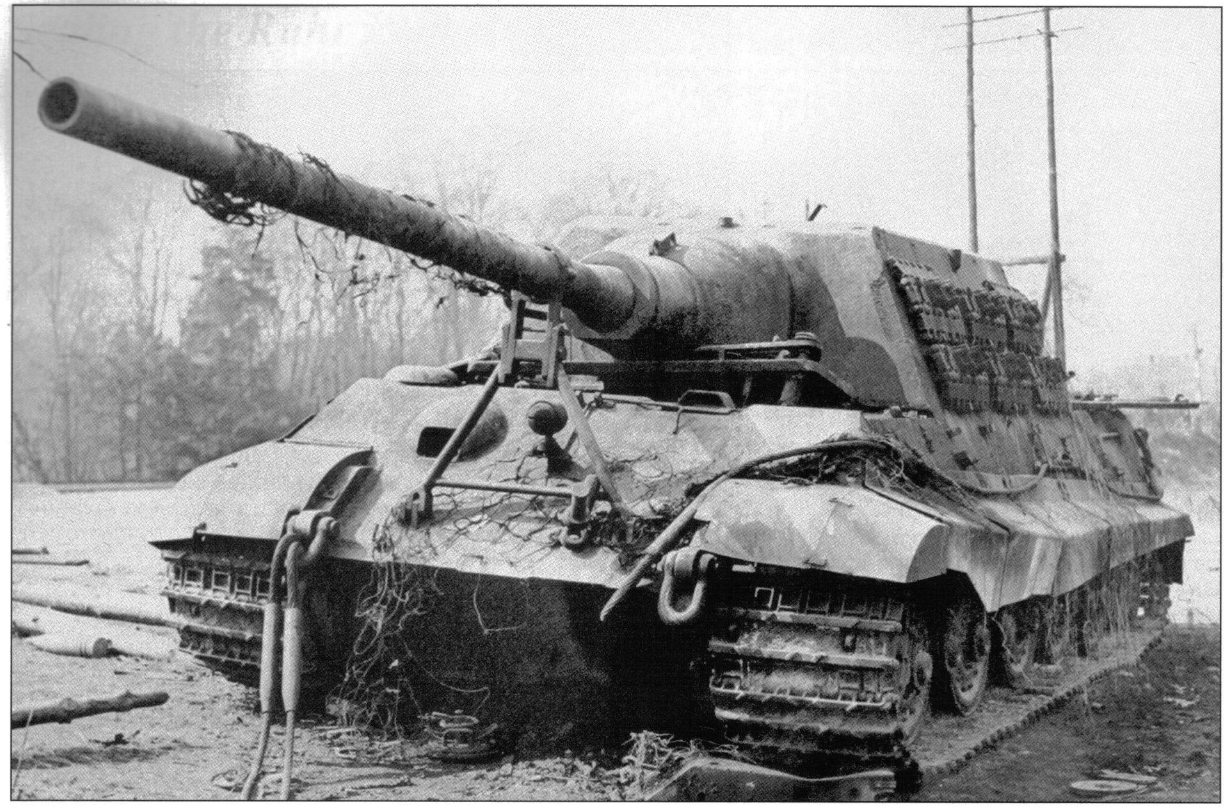
A M4A3 (76mm) leads a column into Braunschweig on 11 April 1945. The 2nd Armored Division's main opposition that day was a complex of sixty seven large caliber anti-aircraft guns ringing the Hermann Göring steel plant southwest of the city. (NARA)



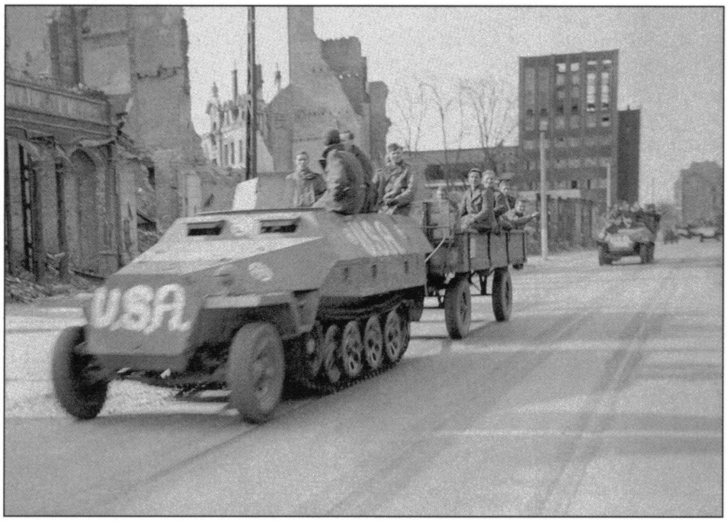
A M4A1 fitted with a dozer blade clears a German road obstruction in Bamberg after the town was taken by the 3rd and 45th Divisions on 13 April 1945. This is an old M4A1 fitted with the early version of the M34 gun mount without the collars on the gun mantlet. (NARA)



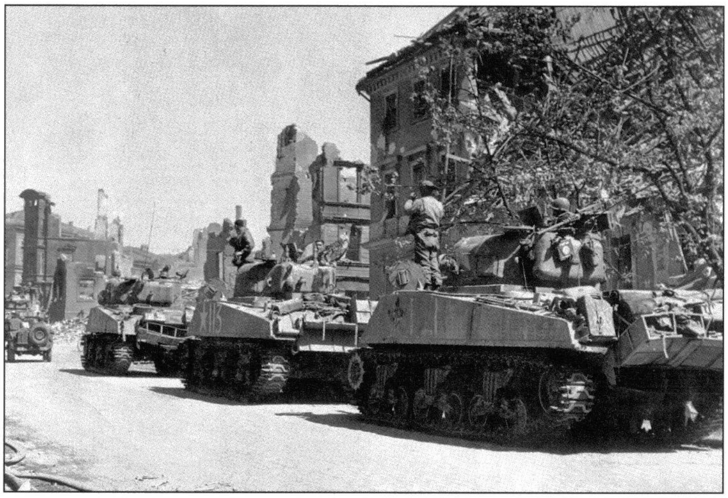
This Jagdtiger of 2/s.Pz.Jg.Abt.512 which was abandoned in Bad During during the Ruhr pocket fighting after having fought against the 3rd Armored Division near Paderborn. The companies of this battalion used a less common pattern of tactical markings with the letters X, Y, and Z for the three companies that were formed. (MHI)



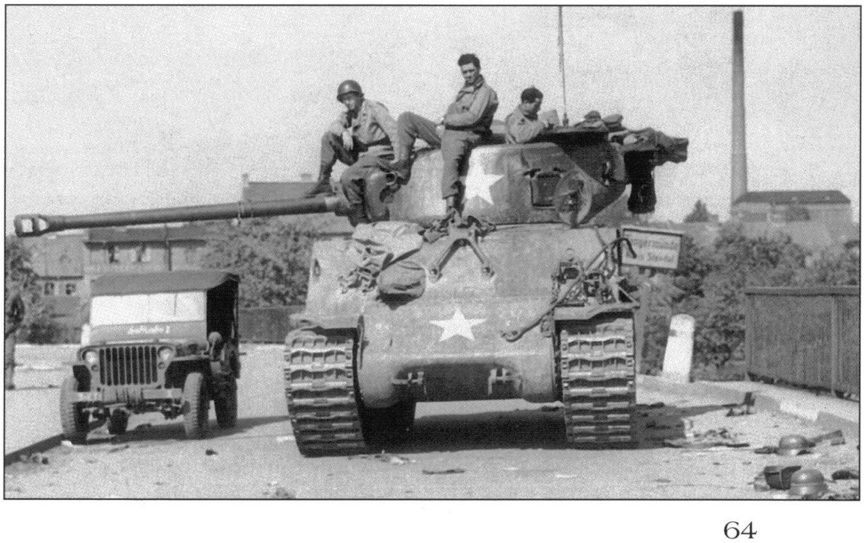
Another view of one of the Jagdtigers of 2/s.Pz.Jg.Abt.512 abandoned in Bad During after the collapse of the Ruhr pocket on 14 April 1945. This view clearly shows the large cradle assembly used to lock down the enormous barrel of the 128mm gun while the vehicle was in transit. (MHI)



A number of Sd.Kfz.251 Ausf.D half-tracks were impressed into service by the 102nd Division following the capture of Hannover. Here, they are being used to move British and US prisoners of war from a nearby camp on 14 April 1945. (USMA)

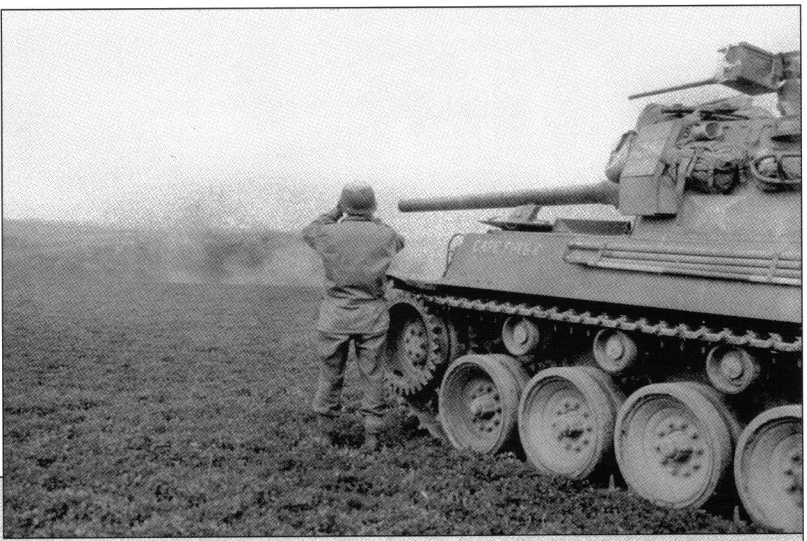


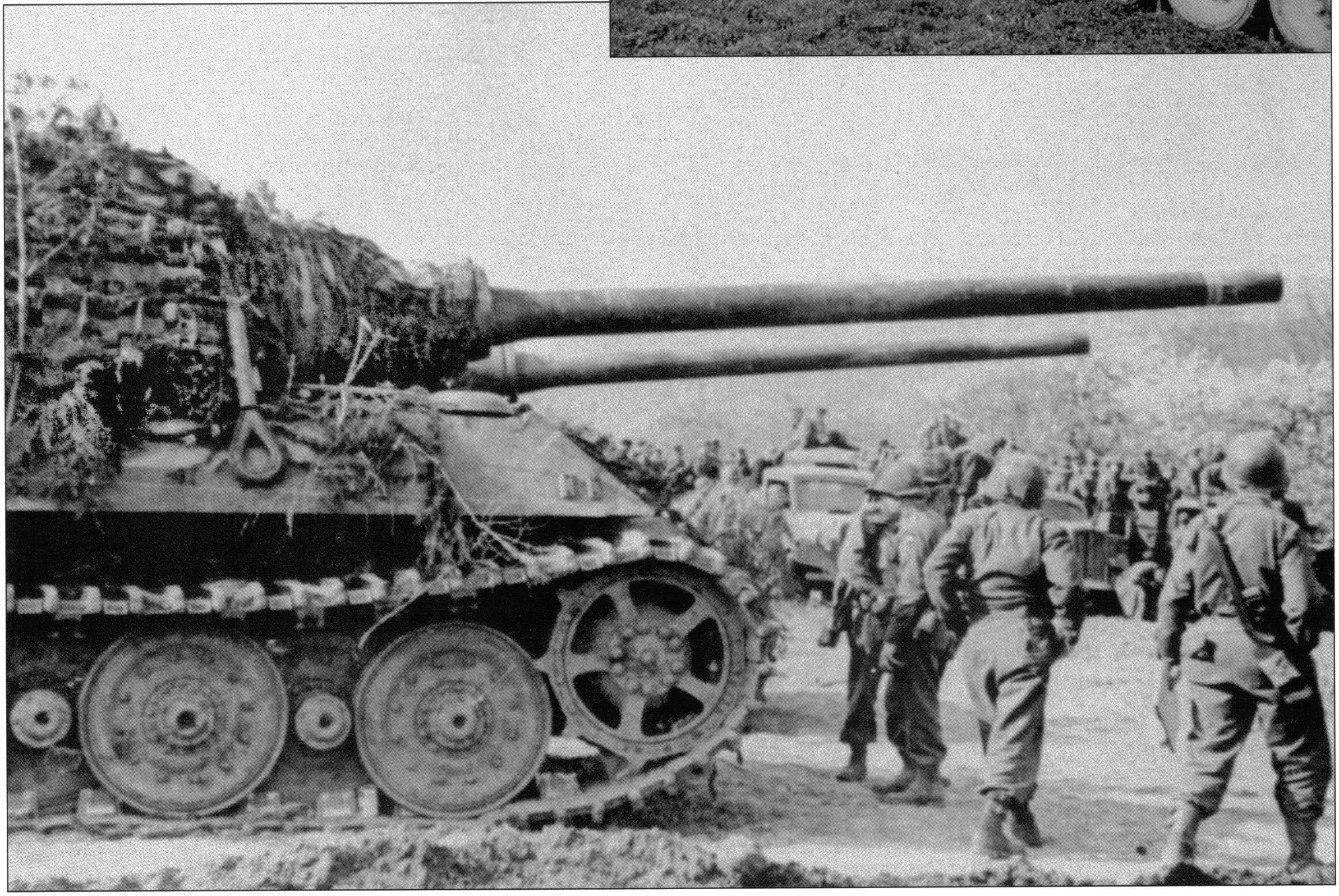
A column of M4A3 from the 11th Armored Division moves through the rubble of Bayreuth on 15 April 1945, a day after the city was taken by Patton's XII Corps. The tanks are the later wet-stowage M4A3 and carry the large tactical numbers typical of the 11th Armored Division at this stage of the war. (NARA)



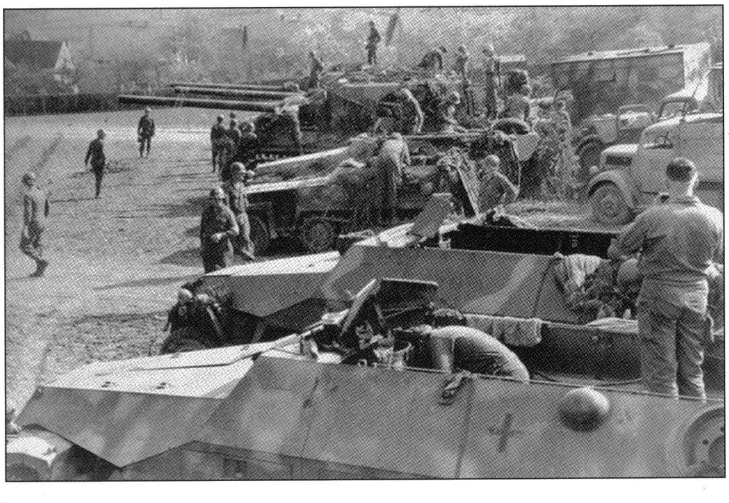
A M4A3E8 (76mm) of the 5th Armored Division guards a bridge on the outskirts of Tangermunde. The division pushed fifty miles on 12 April from Magdeburg, but were held at the river on the outskirts of the town when the German defenders blew the bridge, leaving them only 53 miles from Berlin. (NARA)

The commander of a M18 of the 603rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, 6th Armored Division observes the fall of shot from beside his vehicle nicknamed "Care Free II" during the fighting near Koltzchen on 15 April 1945. (NARA)

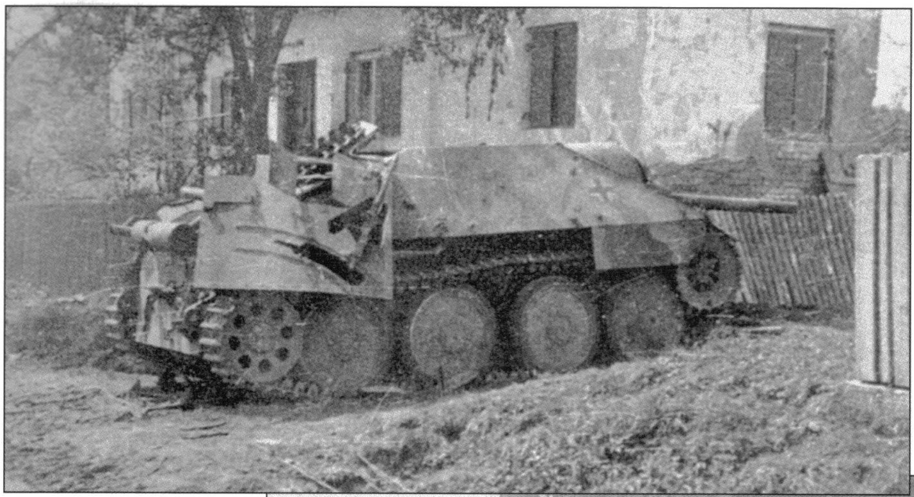




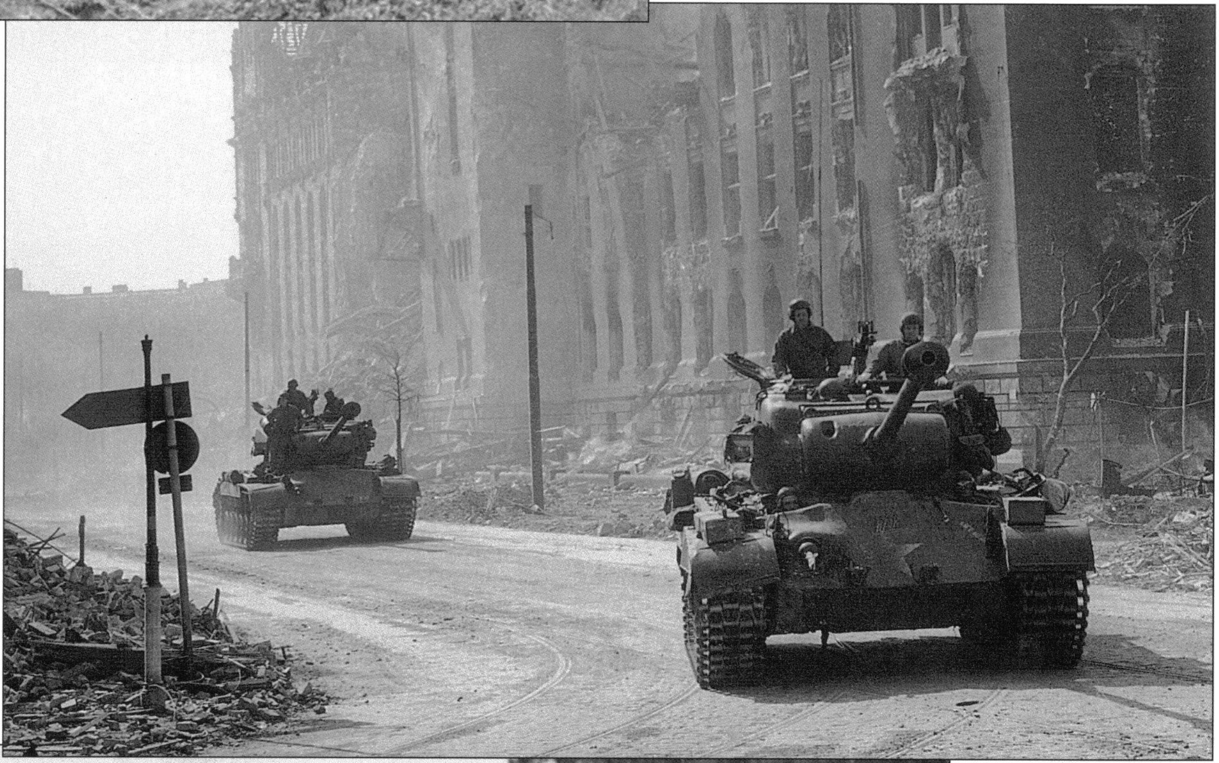
The company of Jagdtiger tank destroyers of s.Pz.Jg.Abt.512 led by Hptm. Ernst fought for several days against the 3rd Armored Division and other US units around Paderborn in mid-April. The company finally surrendered on 16 April in Iserlohn following the envelopment of the Ruhr pocket. Three of the remaining Jadgtigers were formed up in the town square for the surrender ceremony to troops of the 99th Infantry Division. The nearest Jagdtiger has two kill bands on its barrel. (MHI)



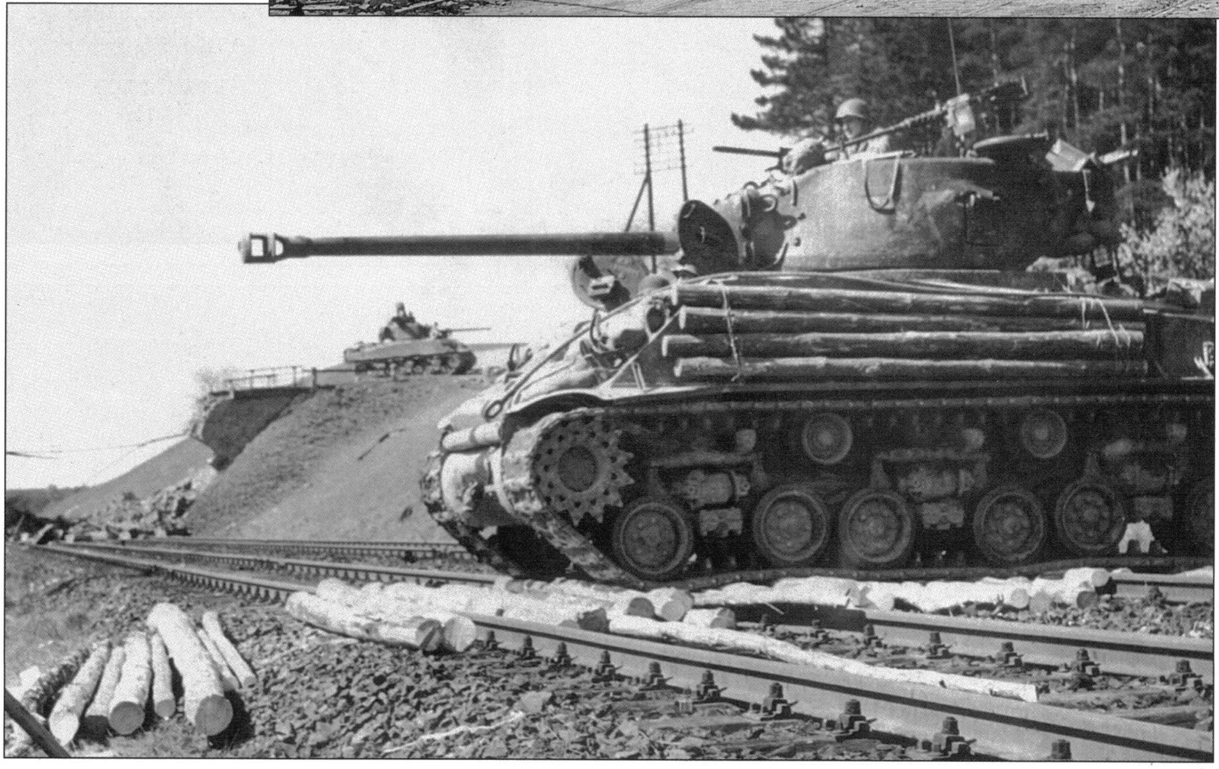
The vehicles of Ernst's Jagdtiger company are seen here from the opposite direction of the previous photo, with a pair of Sd.Kfz.251 Ausf.D in the foreground. These are apparently Sd.Kfz.251/18 Beobachtungspanzerwagen, used as observation vehicles for the company with the FuG12 radio set. (MHI)



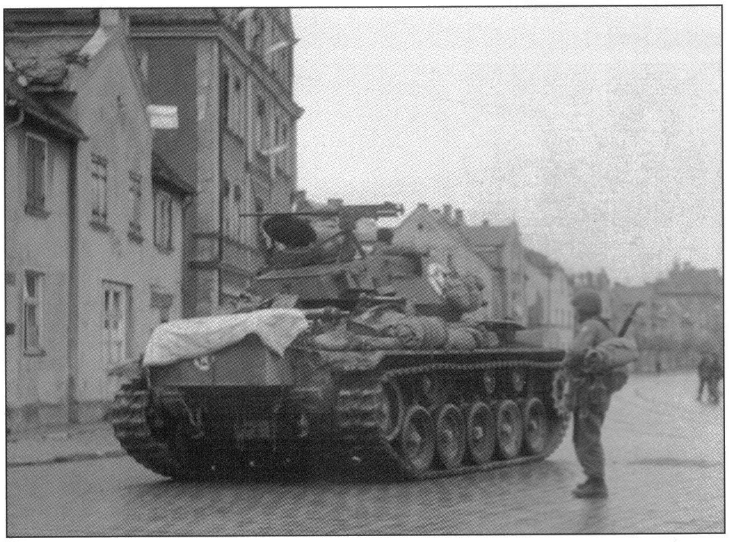
This Jagd.Pz.38(t) was knocked out during the fighting in the Ruhr pocket in mid-April during action with the 99th Division. It has suffered an internal ammunition explosion which has blown off its roof. (MHI)



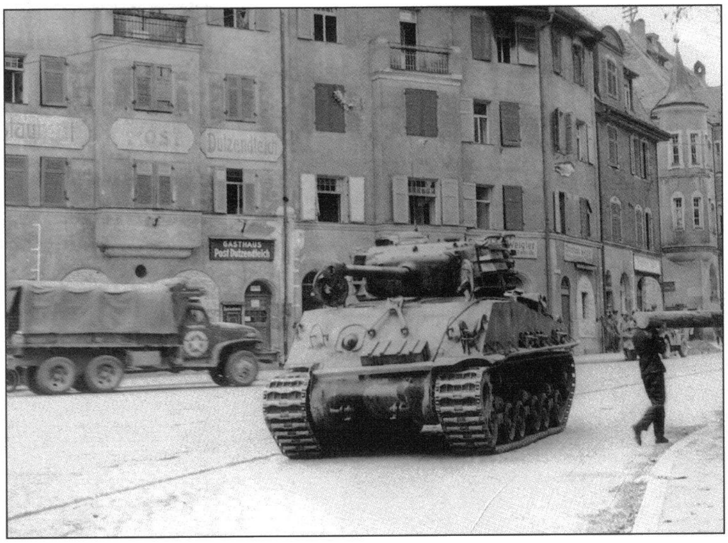
A pair of T26E3 tanks of the 2nd Armored Division move through the ruins of Magdeburg on 18 April as the defense of the city was collapsing. The 2nd Armored Division only began to receive the new T26E3 tanks in the final days of March 1945. (NARA)



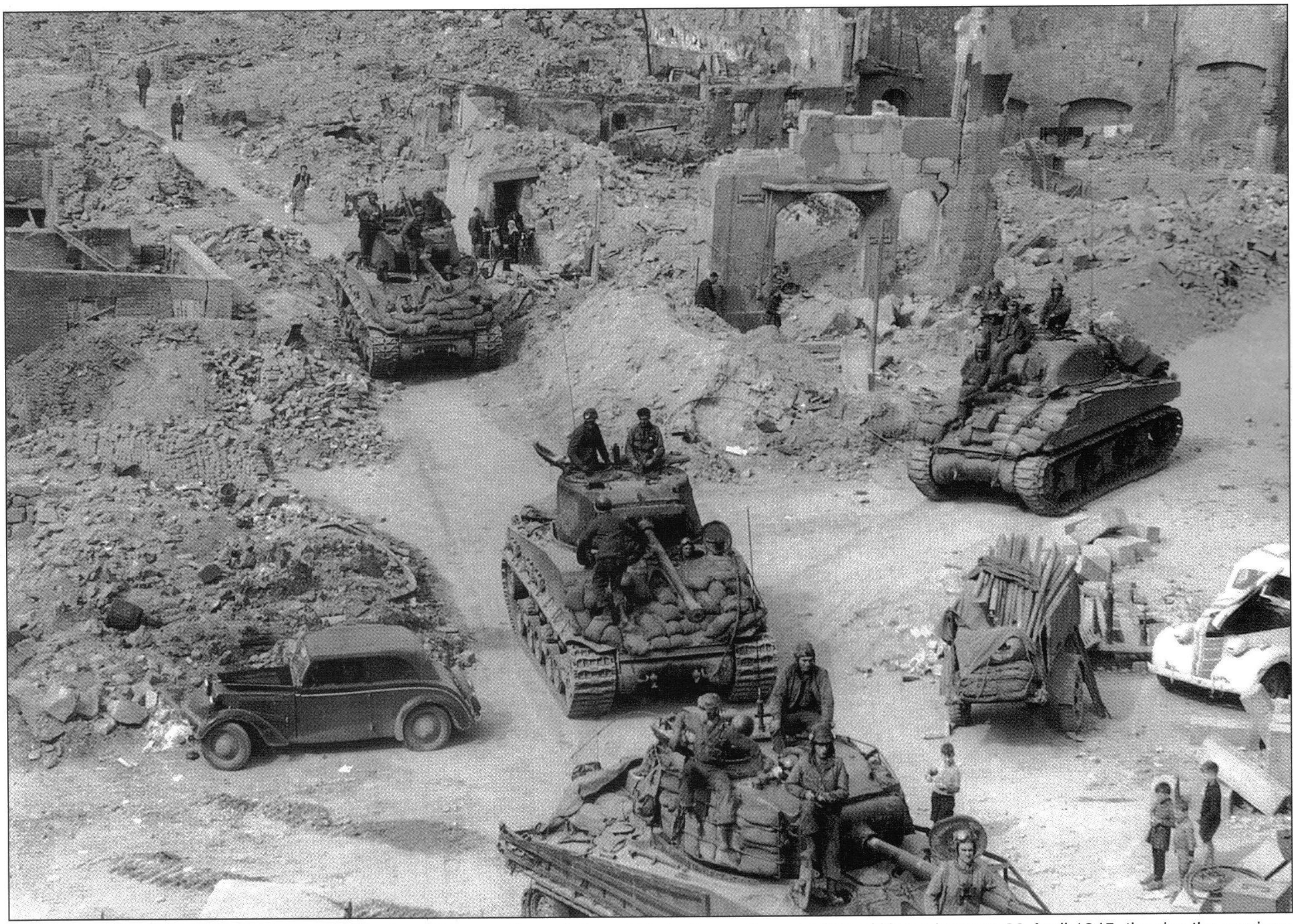
A new M4A3E8 (76mm) tank of the 12th Armored Division crosses a railroad track near Unterlaimbach on the main highway to Neustadt am der Aisch on 20 April 1945. It has a length of corduroy matting on the hull side. (NARA)



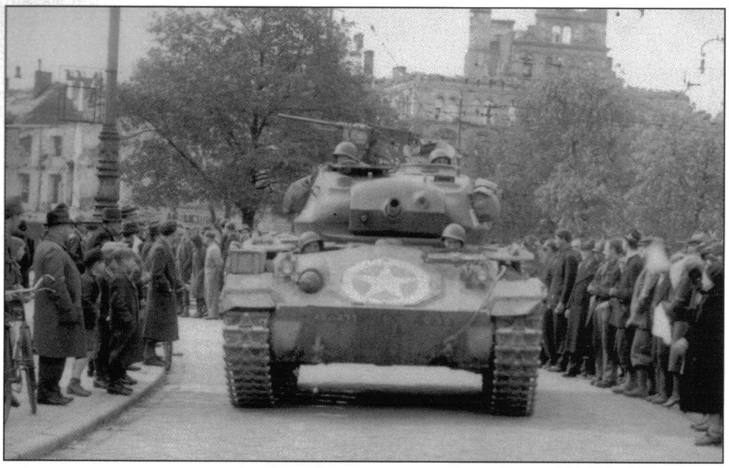
A M24 light tank sits at a cross-roads in Augsberg while supporting the 3rd Infantry Division. The city surrendered the day before, 27 April 1945. (NARA)



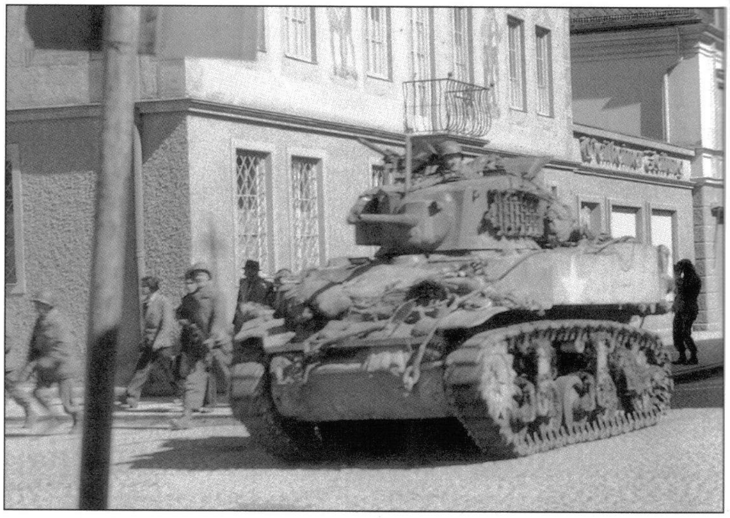
Another M4A3E8 (76mm) of the 14th Armored Division in Nuremberg on 20 April, with the sandbag basket on the turret side, but lacking the usual frame on the hull side or the front sand-bags. (NARA)



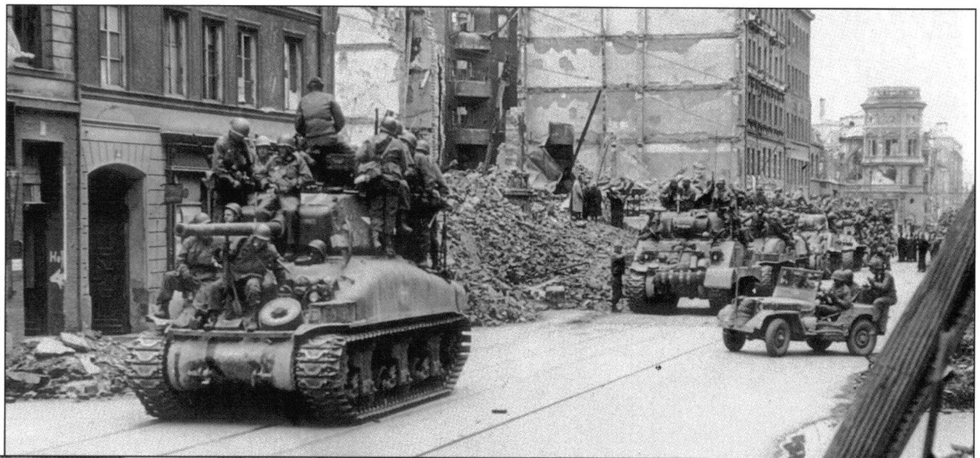
A group of three M4A3E8 (76mm) and a lone M4 move through the rubble in the northern portion of Nuremberg on 20 April 1945, the day the garrison finally surrendered. Several days earlier, the 14th Armored Division defeated the small armored contingent defending the city, Gruppe Grafenwehr, an improvised force of 35 tanks scraped together from local factories. The lead M4A3E8 has the characteristic baskets for sand-bags of the 14th Armored Division while the two behind it are probably replacements received after the February-March sand-bag project. The old M4 tank to the right has an unusual pattern of appliqué armor on the hull side. (NARA)



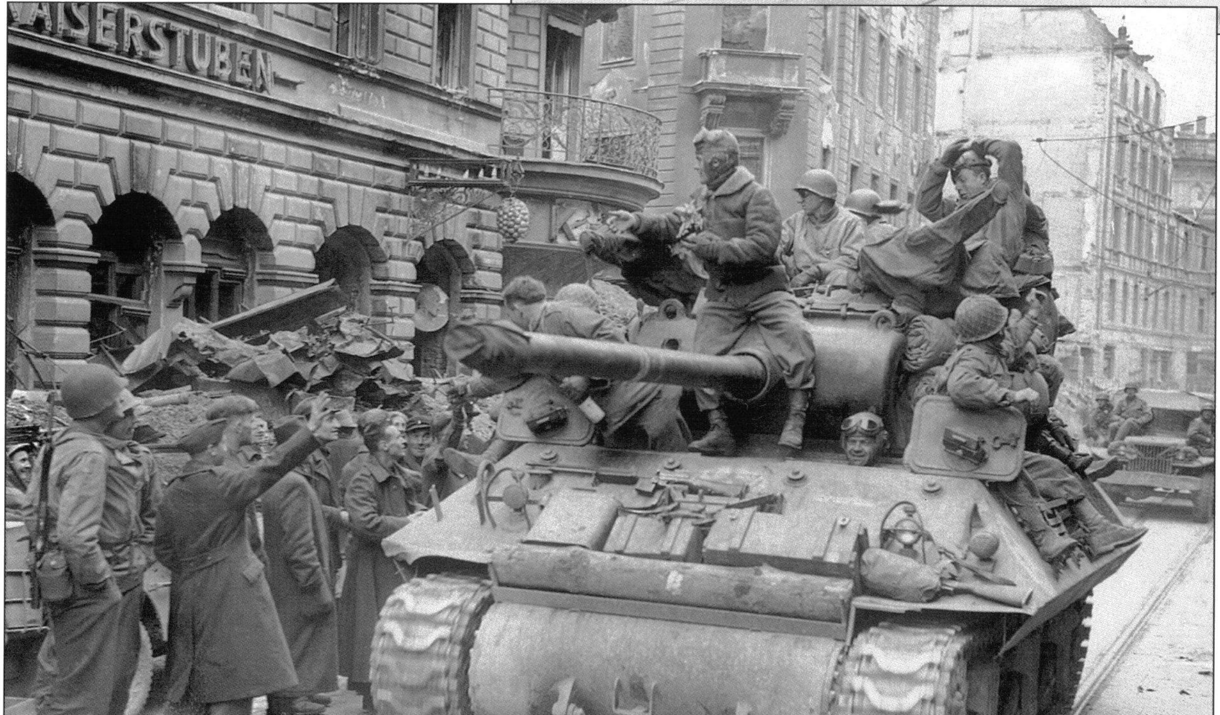
A M24 light tank of Company D, 27th Tank Battalion, 20th Armored Division moves down the streets of Munich on 30 April 1945. The 20th Armored Division was one of the last US armored divisions to enter combat, only six days before on 24 April 1945. (NARA)



A M5A1 of the 116th Cavalry Recon Squadron supporting the 12th Armored Division pushes through Heim on 28 April 1945. (NARA)

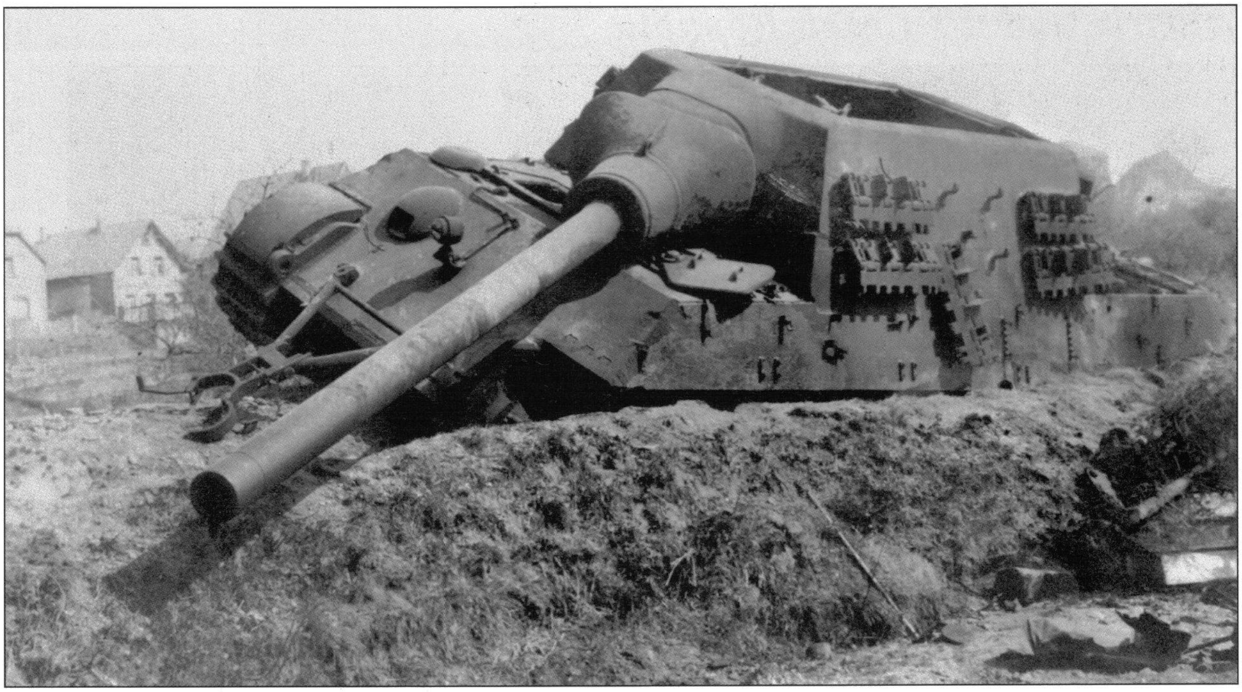


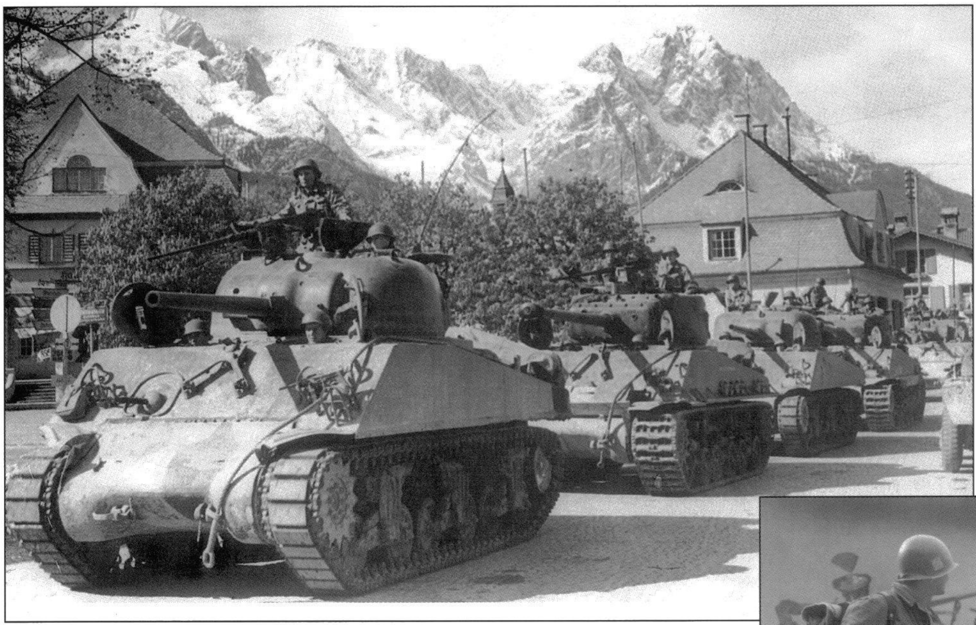
The Bavarian capitol of Munich was a special prize for the US Army, having been the wellspring of the Nazi movement. The city was surrounded by both Patton's Third Army and Patch's Seventh Army with elements of both the 20th Armored and 12th Armored Divisions pushing into the outskirts of the city. This shows a column of tanks of the 12th Armored Division led by a M4A1 (76mm) in Munich on 29 April 1945 prior to the collapse of German resistance the following day. (NARA)



The crew of a M36 90mm tank destroyer throws food to some liberated allied prisoners-of-war in the outskirts of Munich on 29 April 1945 shortly before German resistance in the city finally collapsed. (NARA)

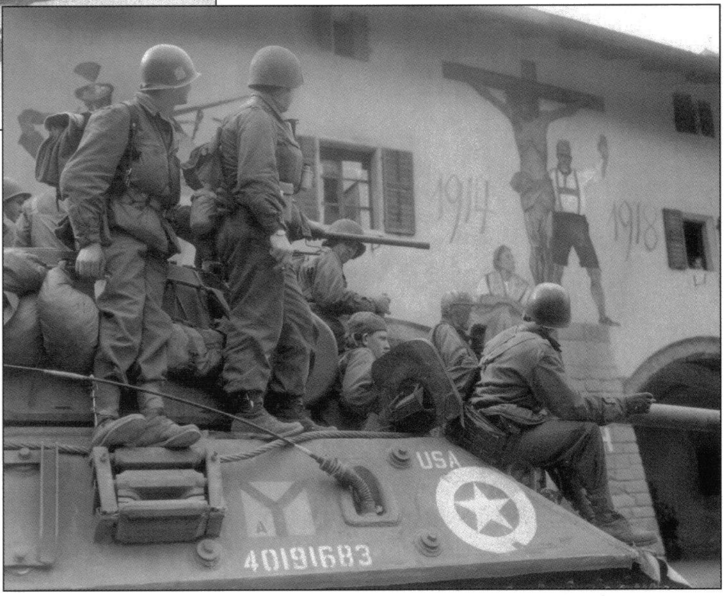
This Jagdtiger of s.Pz.Jg.Abt.653 was knocked out by a concerted attack of five M4 tanks of the 14th Armored Division near Munich. An ammunition fire ripped the roof off. (Patton Museum)





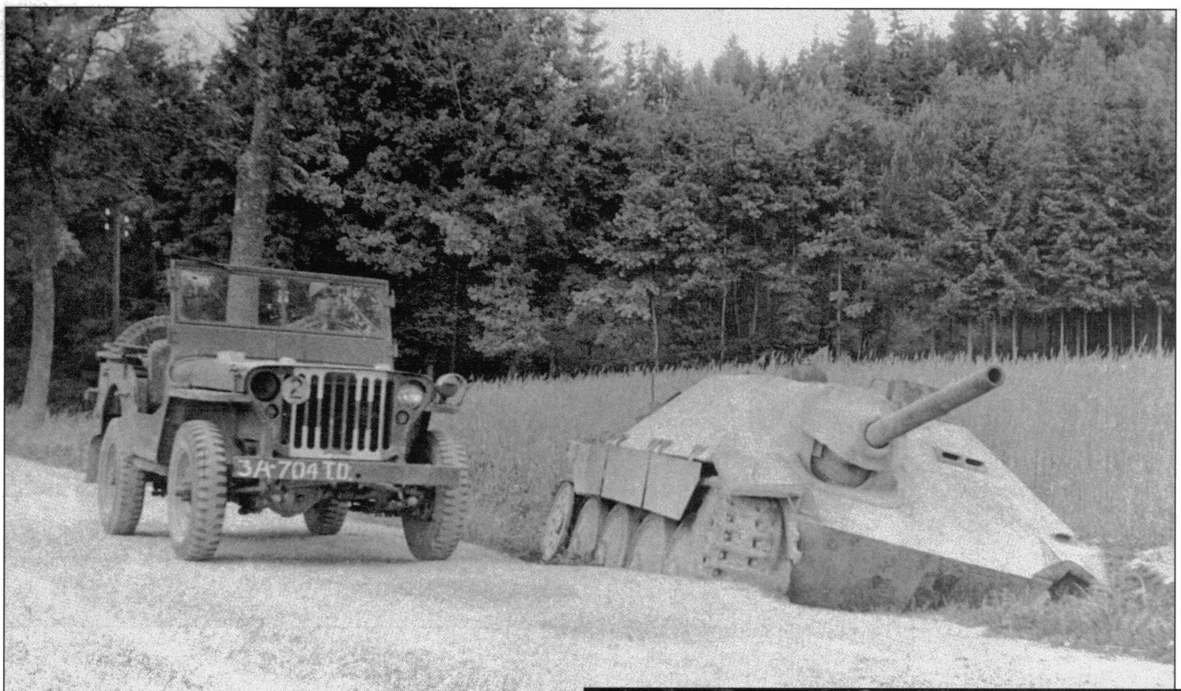
A column of M4 tanks from the 10th Armored Division moves through the picturesque town of Garmisch-Partkirchen in the foothills of the Alps south of Munich on 30 April 1945 as part of the US 6th Army Group drive through Bavaria. The second and fourth tanks are the newer M4A3E8 (76mm). (NARA)

With the end of resistance in Munich on 30 April, a M4 tank of the 9th Tank Battalion, 20th Armored Division moves through the streets of the city to the waves of Germans civilians relieved that the war is finally over. (NARA)

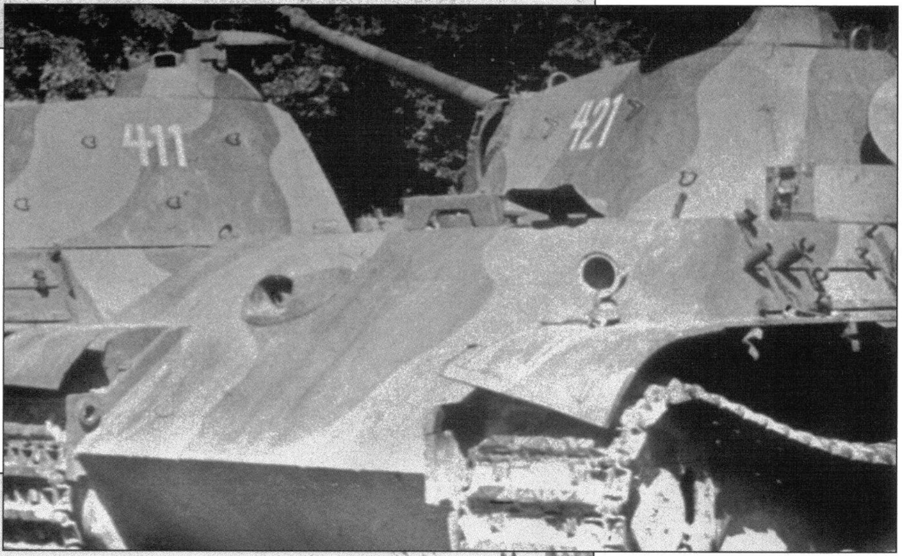


A M36 90mm GMC of the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion moves through Berchtesgaden near Hitler's mountain retreat carrying troops of the 3rd Infantry Division on 4 May 1945. The 601st TD Battalion was the longest serving tank destroyer unit of the war, having fought at El Guettar in the North African campaign in 1943. It was attached to the 3rd Infantry Division for most of the European campaign, and its insignia, a black Y on a yellow square, is evident in this view. (NARA)

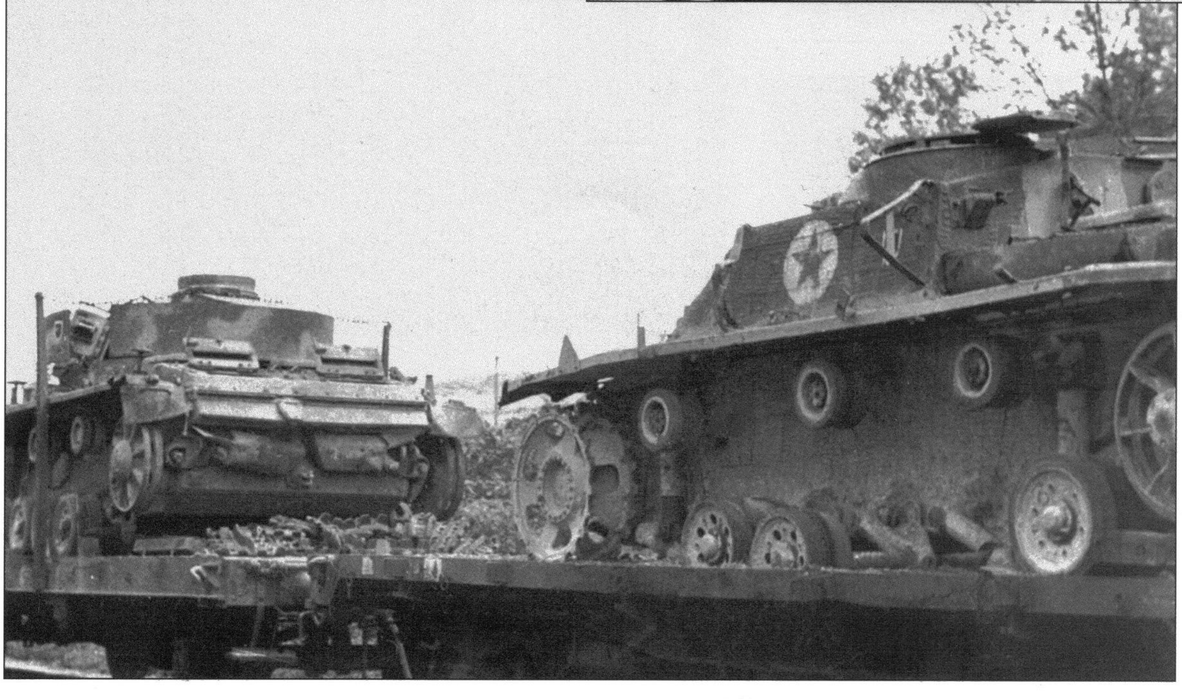
Austria and the Czech Republic



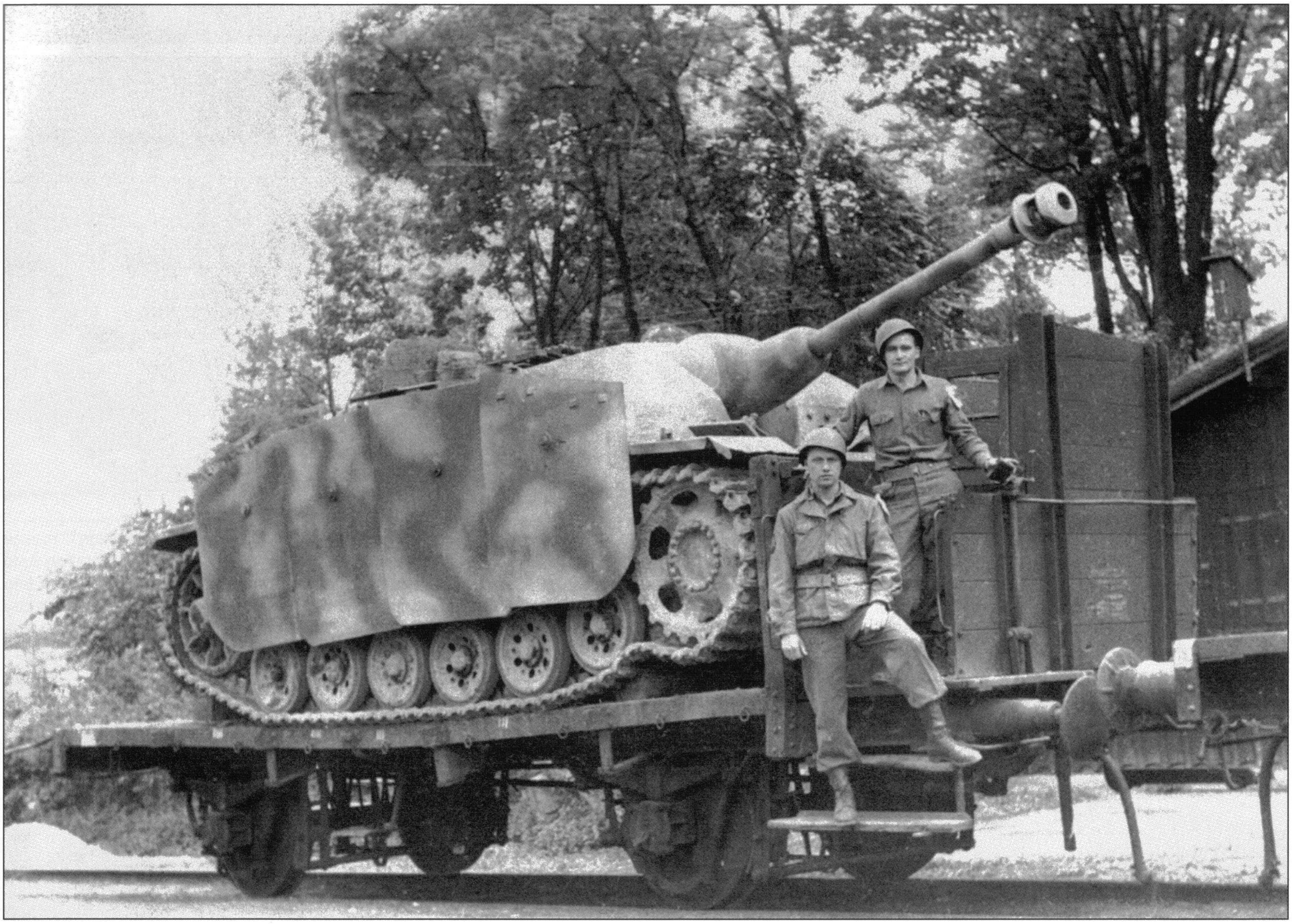
A jeep from the medical detachment of the 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion passes by an abandoned Jagd.Pz.38(t) in western Czechoslovakia after Patton's Third Army moved across the border in the final week of the war. (Patton Museum)



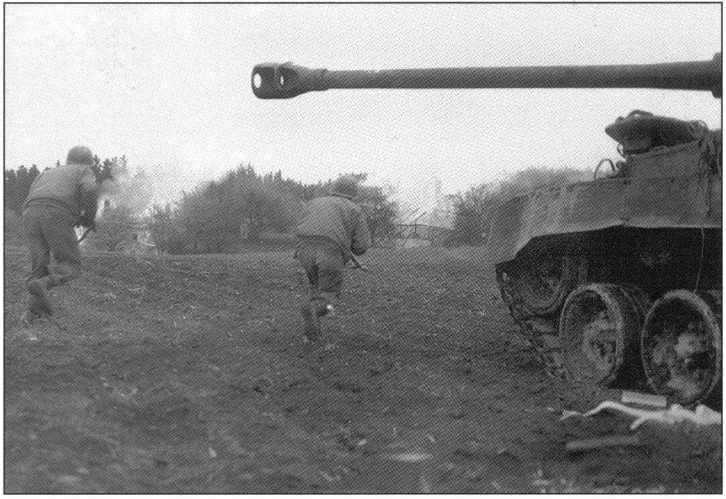
The 11.Panzer-Division surrendered to the US Army on 4 May in Bavaria, and among the vehicles turned over were this pair of late production Panther Ausf.G. They are new production vehicles with late features such as the small oval hooks on the turret sides added on the production lines starting in March 1945 for attaching camouflage. (Patton Museum)



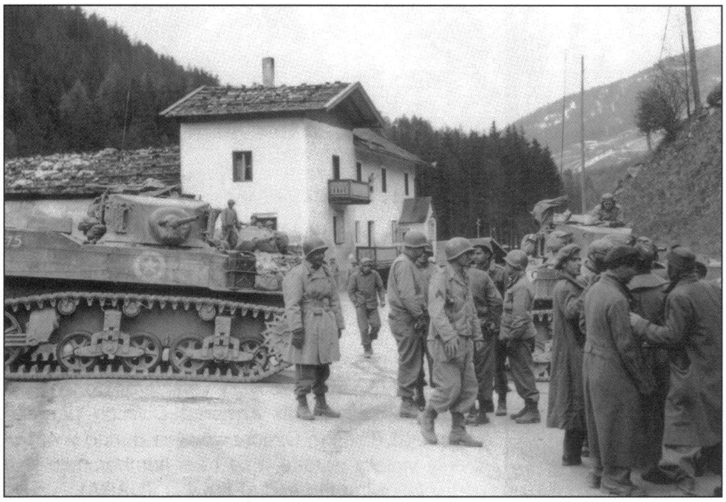
The 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion, 4th Armored Division captured this German train bringing armored equipment back from the front in western Czechoslovakia. The most curious item is the StuG.III Ausf.G at the right. This vehicle had been provided to the Romanian army before it switched sides in the summer of 1944. In September 1944, Romanian armored vehicles, now allied with the Red Army, were repainted with white circles and red stars as seen here. The Romanians fought on the Soviet side for the remainder of the war, and apparently lost this StuG.III to a German unit sometime in the spring of 1945. (Patton Museum)



Another find on the German train in Czechoslovakia was this late production StuG.III Ausf.G complete with *saukopf* mantlet and the added concrete armor on the front, with two medics from the 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion posing in front of it. (Patton Museum)

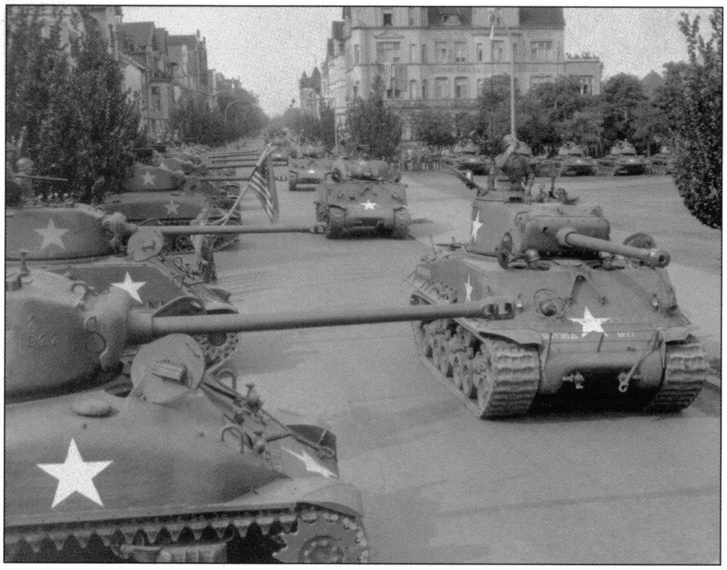


Armored doughs of the 11th Armored Division advance under the watchful eye of a T26E3 tank during the operations near Neufelden, Austria on 4 May 1945. The 11th Armored Division operated more T26E3 tanks than any other unit, receiving 32 of these new tanks in May 1945. (NARA)

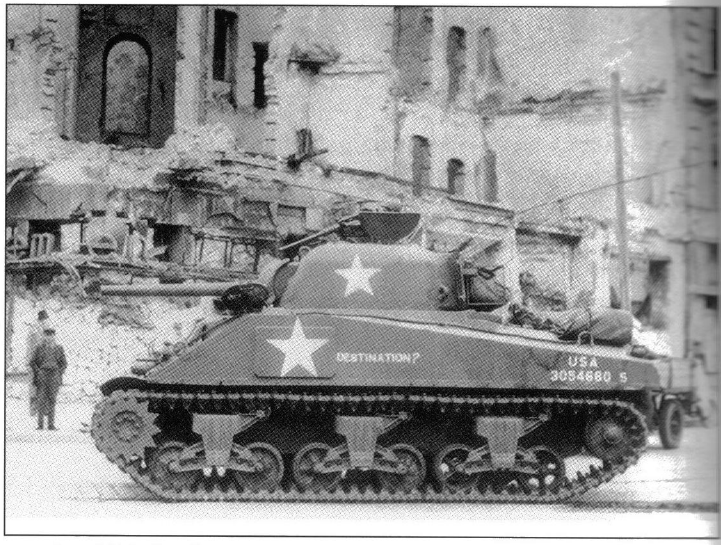


The Allied fronts in Europe met up on 4 May 1945 with the surrender of German forces along the Brenner pass between Austria and northern Italy. A pair of M5A1 of the 757th Tank Battalion of the Fifth Army set up a roadblock in one of the towns in the pass. (NARA)

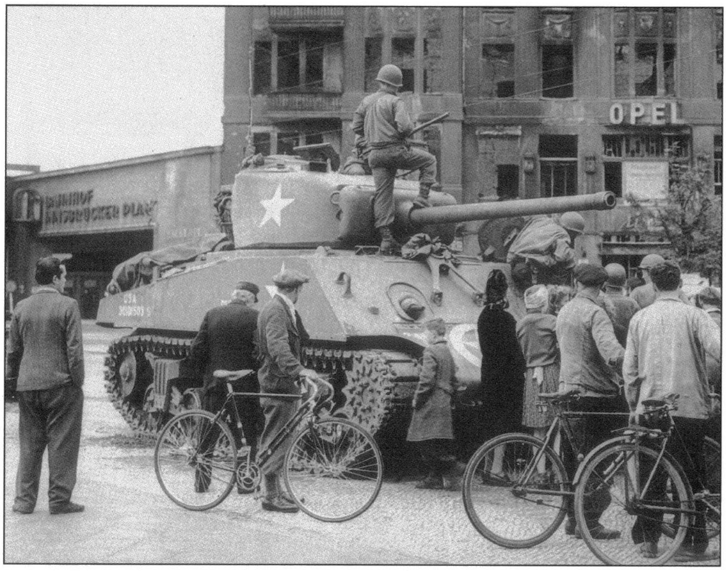
The War's End



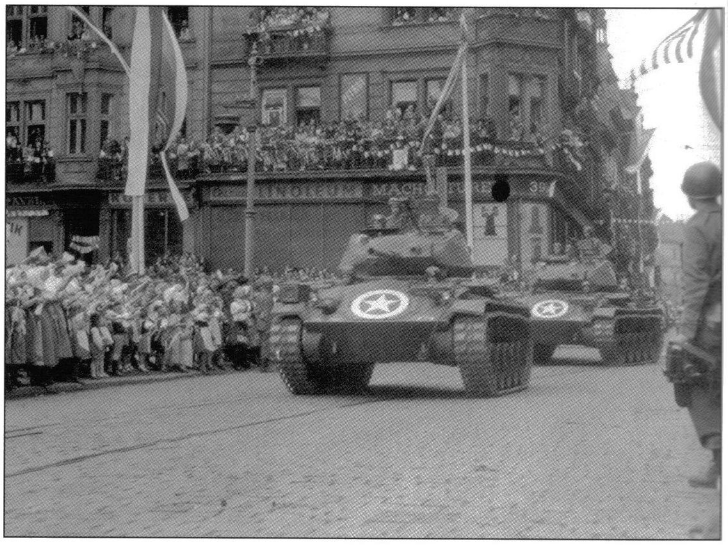
The tanks of the 736th Tank Battalion hold a review in the town square of Piene on 27 May 1945. The tanks have been cleaned up and given a new set of markings. The tank in the lower left is one of the late production M4A1 (76mm) delivered to the ETO in the spring of 1945, and the tank to the right leading the review is a M4A3E8 (76mm). (NARA)



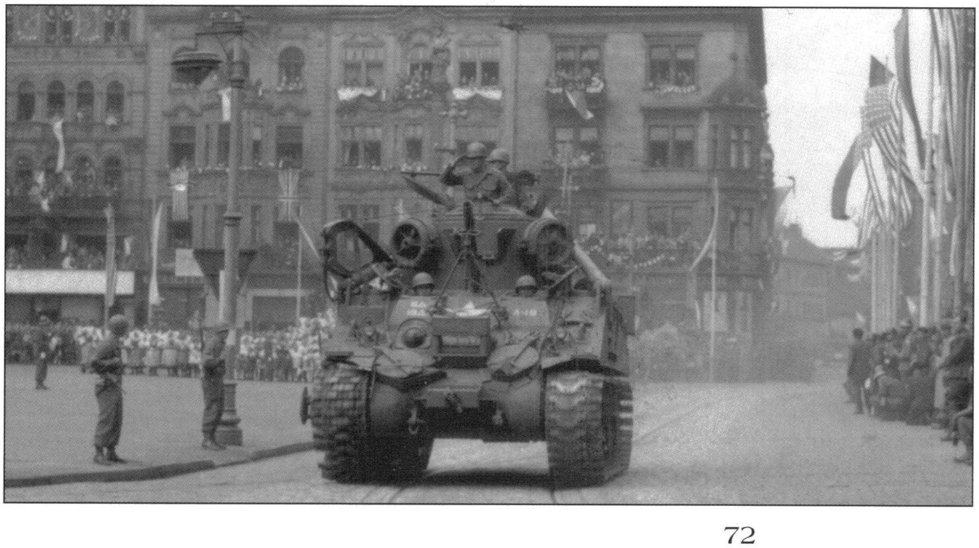
An old M4A3 of the 2nd Armored Division named "Destination?" moves through the rubble of Berlin prior to the 4th of July victory celebration held there in 1945. The 2nd Armored Division was the first US division sent into Berlin after the war to occupy the American sector there. This is an early dry stowage vehicle and is interesting in that the turret is one of the less common styles lacking the side shell ejection port. (NARA)



A M4A3 (76mm) of the 2nd Armored Division is surrounded by a crowd of curious onlookers in the Zehlendorf area of Berlin on the 4th of July 1945. The tank has been cleaned up for the occasion, including the removal of the appliqué armor on the glacis plate so characteristic of this division.



A M24 of the 38th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, 102nd Cavalry Group take part in a victory parade in Prague, Czechoslovakia in July 1945 following the end of hostilities. Gaudy markings like the allied stars on the bow of these tanks were painted on US vehicles for the post-war victory parades. (NARA)



A M32 tank recovery vehicle of Co. A, 18th Tank Battalion, 8th Armored Division parades through Plzen in Czechoslovakia during a 4th of July victory parade, one of a number held that day following the end of the war. (NARA)

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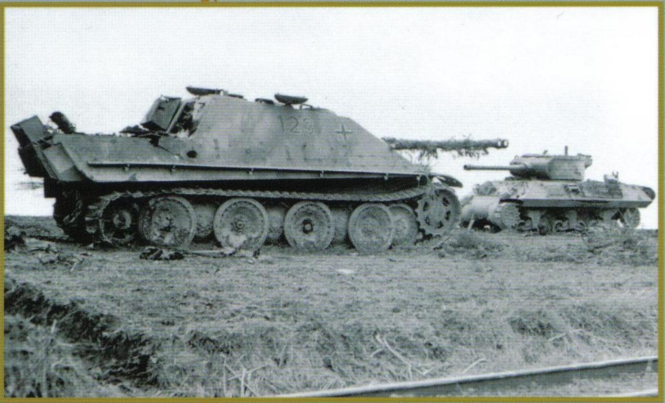

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